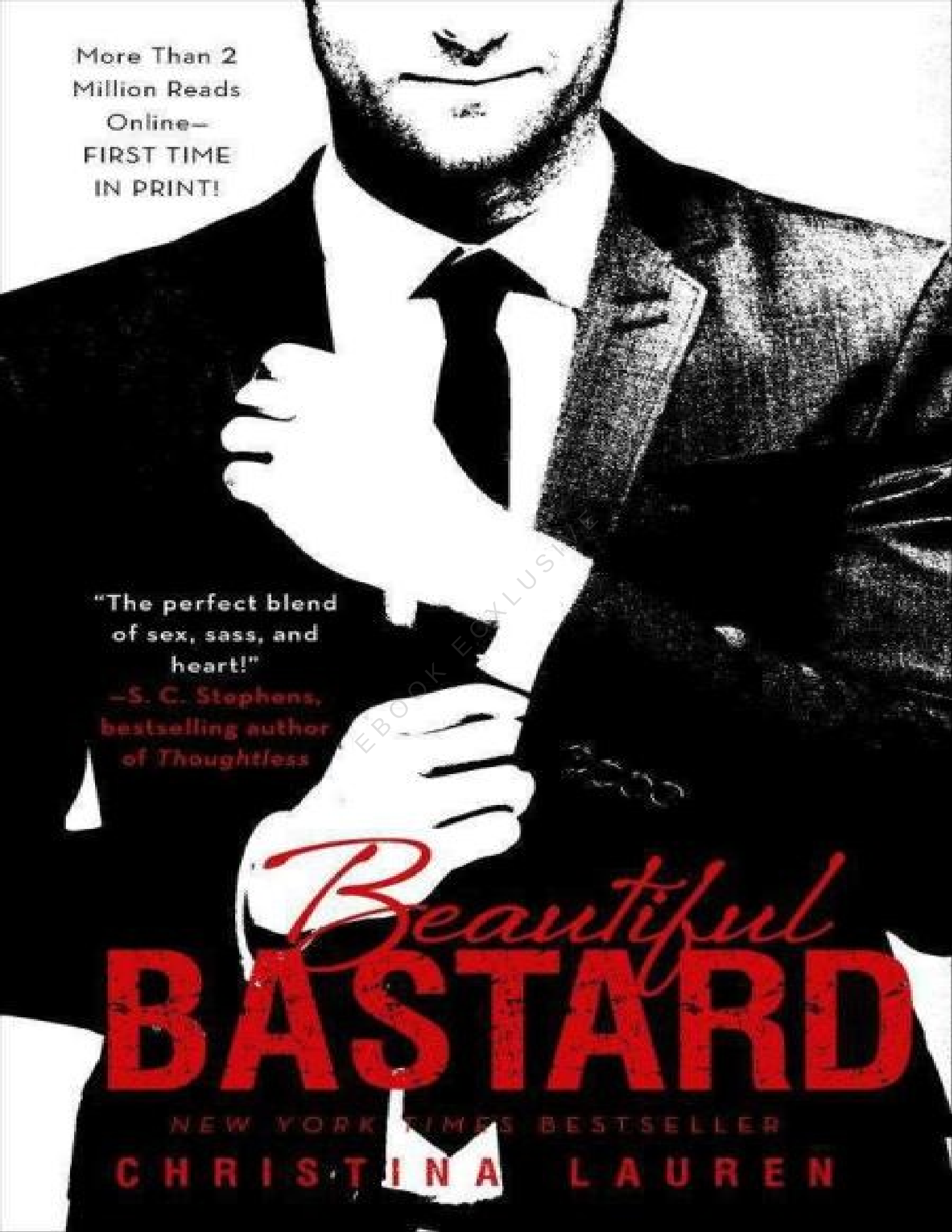
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EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

The Office

Beautiful Bastard

By

Christina Lauren

tby789

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ONE – Beautiful Bastard

"Shit," I mumbled to myself. I knew the moment I woke up this morning that my day was going to suck. Sitting in my car, I tried to peer around the huge SUV in front of me. What the hell is the problem? I had been stuck in the same spot on this forsaken freeway for ten minutes now. And that was ten minutes more than I had. I looked at the clock again. *Shit.*

I sighed and glanced out the window, my eyes meeting those of the driver next to me. The forty-something man flashed me a creepy smile and mouthed the word 'nice', Ew. Why did men have to be such pigs? I leaned my head back on the seat and let out a long sigh, thinking back on the debacle that had begun my day.

I had woken to the blaring sound of My Chemical Romance playing through the speakers of my alarm clock. I moaned, burying my head in my pillow, and reached over to fumble with the controls. But the sound didn't quiet, it got louder. *What the hell?* I leaned farther to pull the cord out of the wall, and fell out of bed. Unfortunately, the clock and everything else on my nightstand table came tumbling with me.

Oh no! My Blackberry! My now empty glass of water lay next to my sopping wet phone. Panic started to set in as I held the dripping phone in my hand. I was dead. My whole life and Mr. Ryan's entire schedule was in this thing. I took a deep breath, willing myself to calm down. Maybe it would dry out and be fine, I told myself . *Yea right. Because water and expensive electronic devices go so well together.*

I silently prayed that I had remembered to back it up before leaving last night. But after remembering the day that I had yesterday, I was almost positive I'd forgotten. My boss, Bennett Ryan, had been in a particularly nasty mood, and had spent the majority of his day barking out orders and slamming his door. The man was a first class jerk. He had taken over for my previous boss nine months earlier, and was just as big a pig now as he was the day he started. Usually it didn't bother me, I hadn't gotten where I was by having thin skin. But that day I had been wearing my brand new Michael Kors dress, a huge shopping splurge and was feeling particularly good about myself. His tantrum had me ready to hire a hit man by the time six o'clock came around.

I sighed when I realized that I would have to spend my lunch hour getting a

new phone. Great. I somehow managed to pull myself out of my internal rambling and get myself ready for the day. Of course the coffee maker died, and my keys had fallen into the couch cushion, but somehow, I managed to make it to my car only running a few minutes behind. That was of course until the accident.

It took almost an hour for me to finally make it past the wreck that was blocking three lanes of traffic, condensing the entire freeway down to one. And by the time I made it to the office, I was officially an hour late. Normally I would have called, but my phone was still at home, lying in a pile of water and tear soaked paper towels at the bottom of my bathroom garbage.

I knew I was going to get shit for this, even though I prided myself on always being at least fifteen minutes early for work, and had never been late once. Until today. Just because he was *that* much of an jerkface.

Mr. Bennett Ryan. I rolled my eyes as the name passed through my thoughts; I couldn't stand the man. He was the most self-righteous, pompous jerk I had ever met in my life. I'd listen to all of the other women in the office whisper and giggle about him because even I had to admit, he was drop-dead gorgeous. But if you had any common sense, you realized early in life that beauty is only skin deep, and ugly goes straight to the bone. I'd had my fair share of unpleasant men in the past few years; dated a few in high school and college. But this one took the cake. Beautiful bastard.

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"Well, well, Ms. Mills, and what time is it in *your* little world today?" he asked in a condescending tone as I stepped into the office. He was standing in the doorway of his own office across the room from me, looking as gorgeous and arrogant as usual. He was about 6'2", and had a body like a marble sculpture. I had made the mistake of visiting the hotel gym during a convention the first month we worked together, and walked in to find him sweaty and shirtless next to the treadmill. That image was forever burned into my brain. But of course, he had to ruin it by opening his mouth, "It's nice to see you finally taking an interest in your physical fitness, Ms. Mills." Scumbag. He had a face that any male model would kill for and the most incredible hair I've ever seen on a man. Sex hair. That's what the girl's downstairs called it, and according to them, it earned its name.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Ryan. There was an accident on the freeway, and I got here as soon as I could. It won't happen again, *sir*," I said in a polite tone with just a hint of bite, even though my fingers were practically twitching with the desire to gouge out those pretty green eyes of his.

“You’re right, it won’t,” he replied with that cocky smile that made my stomach both turn and leap at the same time. If only he would keep his mouth shut, he’d be perfect. A piece of duck tape across the mouth would do the trick and then I wouldn’t mind the daydreams I would have about us; in the supply room, on his desk, on *my* desk, sprawled out on satin sheets…. “And just so you don’t allow this incident to slip your memory, I want that assignment I put on your desk this morning completed and on my desk by six. Then you’re going to make up the hour lost this morning making your presentation in the conference room with me.”

My eyes widened as his voice broke me out of my now long forgotten thoughts, and I watched him turn away without another word, slamming his office door behind him. What. A. Pig. He knew bloody well that a presentable ad campaign could not be done in… I looked at my watch. Great, seven and a half hours, *if* I skipped my lunch. I tossed my purse under my desk and sat down to turn on my computer mumbling under my breath as I opened the file folder on my desk. Well at least it was a simple shoe ad, not *too* hard to think of a tagline for. But still he’d given me an unrealistic time limit.

Have I mentioned lately that my boss is a *pig*?

As everyone else began filtering out for lunch, I sat at my desk with my coffee and bag of Ritz Bits I’d grabbed from the vending machine on the way back from the ladies’ room. Normally I would bring my lunch or leave with the other assistants to grab something, but time was not on my side today.

Just as I was grumbling about malnutrition, I heard the outer office door open. Looking up I smiled as my friend Angela walked in. Angela had worked for Ryan Inc. almost as long as I had. She was sweet and kind and one of my favorite people here. “Ready for lunch, Chloe?” she asked, smiling sweetly.

“Angela I’m sorry, I know I promised, but this has been the day from hell. There is absolutely no way I can make it.” I looked at her apologetically, as her smile turned into a smirk.

“Day from hell, or boss from hell?” she leaned down and snickered. Angela knew all about Bennett

“the snake” Ryan. He was a living legend in this building. No one argued with him if they wanted to keep their job. Hell, if I wasn’t so good at my job, I wouldn’t be able dish back half the shit I did.

“You’ve got the last part right,” I replied. Blowing my bangs out of my eyes, I let out a big sigh. “Look I am absolutely swamped. You guys go on ahead

without me."

"But…" She tried to argue.

"Angela, there's just no way. Even if I work clear till seven, I still don't think I'll be able to get this finished in time. I really am sorry and I promise to catch you guys next time."

"Alright. But don't you let that moron boss you around. He's lucky to have you and he knows it. We all know who really holds all the cards here, Chloe." Angela smiled and left the office.

This was going to be a long day. I noticed for the third time in as many hours my thigh highs had started to slip. I always made it a point to dress impeccably for work. My hair always started up in a stylish twist, although by the end of the day, my curly hair was usually fighting its way free. And thanks to my best friend Alice, my clothes were fashionable, yet professional. She insisted I was made for the "hot secretary" look. So my wardrobe consisted mostly of pencil skirts and feminine blouses and blazers, simple jewelry and of course, again thanks to Alice, the best shoes money could buy. I had always hated wearing heels, but she had taught me that pricier ones tended to be better quality and were more comfortable to wear. I hated to admit it, but she had been right. And my closet was now home to several pairs of sexy designer shoes. The one thing I hated, were my glasses. I always felt like such a dork in them. But contacts never worked for me, and I couldn't read without them. So Alice had helped me pick the perfect pair that in her words "completed the look".

As I bent under my desk to try and straighten my hose, I felt someone approach. Not looking up, I spoke, "Look Angela, I told you…" I stopped when I finally glanced up and saw that it wasn't Angela standing there. My cheeks flushed red and I pulled my skirt back down over my stockings. "I'm sorry Mr. Ryan I…" but he cut me off.

"Miss Mills, since you obviously have time to visit with the other office girls as well as completing the Nike project," he said as he looked down at me. "I need you to also run down to accounting and retrieve the profit analysis for the third quarter. Do you think you can manage that?"

Did he just say office girl? I sighed heavily and looked down at the heaps of work I still had to do, trying to reign in my temper, then up to him to meet his blazing green eyes. "With all due respect, Mr. Ryan. I am only one person and…"

"It wasn't a request. That will be all, Miss Mills," he cut me off, gazing at me

for a moment with a clenched jaw, and then turned on his heel to storm back to his office and slammed the door once again.

What the hell was his problem? Did he really feel it necessary to slam doors behind him? I rolled my eyes and grabbed my blazer from the back of the chair, and began making my way to accounting.

When I returned, I knocked on the office door but there was no response. Hmm. Reaching out I turned the knob slightly, locked. The jerkface probably stepped out for lunch while leaving me here to do his footwork. I shoved the manila folder through the mail slot in his door roughly, hoping the papers scattered everywhere and he had to get down and sort them himself. Would serve him right.

Then again, as an afterthought, I hoped not. Knowing him, he would call me into that hole to do it while he watched; taking more time from my already impossible project.

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Bloody hell! I thought to myself for the hundredth time in the last hour. I raced down the darkened hall of the now empty building; the presentation materials clutched haphazardly in my arms, and glanced down at my watch. *7:20. Holy shit, would nothing go right for me today?* Mr. Ryan was going to have my neck. I was twenty minutes late. He hated late. Late was not a word found in the Bennett Ryan jerkhead Dictionary. Along with heart, kindness, compassion or thank you.

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I found myself once again plotting the murder of the idiot that worked at Kinko's. A simple job, that's all I asked. Make some copies, and bind some documents. Should have been a piece of cake. In and out. But, no. Two hours. *It took two hours*.

And now, there I was, running through the empty halls of my building in my $350 Italian pumps, racing towards the executioner. *Breathe Chloe. He can smell fear.*

As I neared the conference room, I tried pointlessly to calm my breathing. Maybe he would be running late, and was still in his office working. *Yea, right.* I passed his office and my fears were confirmed. The door was open, the desk lamp the only illumination in the room, and there sat his large leather chair. Empty. *Shit.*

I slowed to a walk as I approached the conference room, dim light escaping from beneath the closed door. He was definitely in there, waiting for me.
~~~~~~

Carefully, I attempted to smooth my hair and clothing while holding onto the bundle of documents in my arms. Taking a deep breath, I knocked on the door.

“Come in.” My breath caught and a small gasp escaped my lips at the tone of his voice. He didn’t sound angry, it was worse. He sounded bored. Bored of waiting. I think this is what they mean by the fight or flight reflex.

Straightening my shoulders, I walked into the dimly lit space. The room was large, one side filled with floor to ceiling windows that gave a beautiful view of the Chicago cityscape eighteen stories below. In the center stood a large heavy wood conference table, and seated at the head of the table, facing me, was Mr. Ryan.

He sat there, his suit jacket hanging on the chair behind him, his tie loosened, his shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows and his fingers tented in front of him. A look of total boredom set on his perfect little face. His eyes were boring into mine, but he said nothing.

“I apologize, Mr. Ryan,” I said, my voice wavering with my still labored breathing, “There was a mix up with th-” I stopped. Excuses wouldn’t help my situation. And besides, I wasn’t going to let him blame me for something I had no control over. He could kiss my…you know. With my new found bravery in place, I lifted my chin and walked over to the table.

Without meeting his gaze, I sorted through my papers and placed the presentation on the wooden table before us. “Are you ready for me to begin, Mr. Ryan?” I asked, not trying to hide the venom in my voice.

He looked up at me, not responding, his green eyes piercing my brave front. This would be a lot easier if he wasn’t so beautiful. *What’s the point of having such a beautiful face when there’s such a massive ass attached to it?* I hated myself for noticing his looks. Of course he was gorgeous, that’s how he got away with being such a gigantic prick to everyone. Every woman in this building threw themselves at him, and he was too arrogant and conceited to even acknowledge it. Everyone but me that is. I prided myself on being the only one who never attempted to gain his attention. He might be sexy as hell, but one word out of that mouth usually took care of the problem.

Still not saying anything, he gestured his hand to the documents before him, urging me to continue . I cleared my throat and began my presentation. As I moved through the different phases of the campaign, he didn’t say a word. He merely looked forward, his eyes meeting nothing.

I was leaning over the table, gesturing towards a set of photographs when I

felt it. His hand lifted slowly from his lap and pressed gently into my lower back before sliding down, settling on my ass.

"The print company can have this do-" I stopped mid sentence, my breath caught in my throat, and I froze. A million thoughts raced through my mind in that instant. In the nine months I had worked for him, he had never intentionally touched me. *This* was most definitely intentional.

The heat from his hand, burned through my skirt and into my skin. Every muscle in my body tensed, as a shudder ran through me. What the hell was he doing? My brain screamed at me to push his hand off, to tell him to never touch me again, but my body had other ideas. My nipples hardened, and I clenched my jaw in response. *Traitor nipples.*

I let out the breath I'd been holding, and I felt my heart pounding in my chest. At least a minute had to have passed, and neither of us said anything, our breathing and the muted noise of the city below the only sounds echoing in the still air of the conference room.

"Turn around Ms. Mills," he said quietly. The sound of his voice broke the silence; I gasped silently and closed my eyes at the sound. I straightened my back, eyes facing forward. Slowly I turned, his hand moving with me, sliding to my hip. I looked down to meet his eyes, and he looked intently back at me. More silence.

I could see his chest rising and falling; each breath deeper than the last. His thumb began to move, slowly sliding back and forth; his eyes never leaving mine. He was waiting for me to stop him; there had been plenty of time for me to say something. But as much as I hated him, I knew I couldn't say those words. I had never felt this way. Every muscle was tensed in anticipation. I could feel the heat emanating from his hand, coursing through my body, and the moisture beginning to seep into my panties.

With his eyes locked to mine, he began to slowly slide his hand lower. His fingers ran down my thigh, to the hem of my skirt. He moved it aside and his hand rested on the tops of my stockings, curling his smooth hand around my thigh. As his hand rose up my leg, my body trembled with the power of the rage and lust battling inside me. *How dare he think he can touch me?* I hated him more than I'd known was possible, but right now, I hated myself more. How could I let my body react like this? I wanted to slap him in the face; but more than that, I wanted him to keep going. The slow ache between my legs was building, and I could feel the wetness pooling as his fingers inched closer. He reached the edge of my lace panties and he slipped his fingers under the hem. I

felt him slide against my hairless lips, and graze my clit before plunging his finger inside me. I closed my eyes, and bit my lip trying to stifle my groan. When I looked down at him, his eyes were wild with lust, and beads of sweat were forming on his brow.

“Fuck,” he growled quietly. His eyes closed and he seemed to be waging the same internal battle as I was. I glanced down at his lap and could see him hard, straining against the fabric of his pants. With his eyes still closed he withdrew his finger and fisted the thin lace of my panties in his hand. He was shaking and he looked up at me, fury and lust in his eyes. In one quick movement he tore them from my body, the rip of the fabric echoing in the silence.

He pulled my hips roughly, lifting me up onto the cold table and spreading my legs in front of him. I felt the heat spread rapidly through my center, and I gave an involuntary groan as his fingers returned to rub roughly against my clit. I despised this man and everything he stood for, but my body was betraying me; it craved the touch he was giving me. Not the same gentle loving touches I was accustomed to, but working my body into an animalistic frenzy. My head fell back as I leaned back on my elbows, feeling my impending orgasm approaching fast.

But then he stopped, removing his hand from inside me and I actually throbbed from the loss. I whimpered loudly as my head flew up to look at him. I sat up quickly taking the front of his shirt in my fists and pulling his lips roughly against mine. He even tasted amazing, and I hated that. I bit his lower lip as my hands made quick work down to the front of his pants, undoing his belt hastily. “You better be ready to finish what you started, Mr. Ryan.”

He growled and took my blouse in his hands and ripped it open, the buttons flying aimlessly across the carpet. He gripped my breasts roughly, shooting such a pleasurable pain through my body, and causing my hands to quicken their motions to unfasten his pants and shove them, along with his boxers to the floor. I gripped his thick hard length in my hand and squeezed, feeling it pulse against my palm. “Oh I intend to do more than that, Miss Mills.”

The way he seethed my name should have sent a rush of fury through me, but I only felt one thing right now. Pure, unadulterated lust. I suddenly felt my skirt being pushed up my thighs, and he pushed my back on the conference table. Before I could utter a single word, I felt him take a hold of my ankles and thrust his long hard cock deep inside me. “Fuck!” I screamed loudly.

“That’s right,” I heard him hiss through clenched teeth, as his hips rapidly slammed against me, driving his cock deep inside. I couldn’t hold back the

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moans and screams. “Never been fucked like this before have you? You wouldn’t be such a fucking cock tease if you were being properly fucked.”

Who did he think he was? And why the hell did it turn me on so much that he was right? I had never had sex anywhere but on a bed, and it never felt like this. His cock felt so damn good inside me, and it awakened things I hadn’t even known existed. Never had I been able to get off during sex. I usually had to sneak away into the bathroom after and take care of things myself. But he’d already had me to the brink twice. “I’ve had better,” I taunted breathlessly, looking up at him through narrowed eyes.

His eyes flared and he pulled out just as I was about to come. I growled at him as he let go of my ankles. At first I thought he was actually going to leave me this way, until he grabbed my arms and yanked me up off the table and crashed his lips against mine again. The next thing I felt was the cold window against my ass, and I groaned at the intense contrasts in temperature between it and my skin. I felt like I was on fire, every part of me wanted to feel his rough touch.

“You really shouldn’t have said that, Miss Mills,” he snarled angrily as he pulled away and quickly turned me around pressing my front against the window and kicking at my feet. “Spread your legs.

Now!”

I obliged and parted my legs for him, he grabbed my hips, pulling me back roughly and impaling me on his cock again. “Fuck!”

“You like that don’t you,” he sneered, taking my earlobe between his teeth and dragging them across my skin. “Now all of Chicago can look up here and see you getting fucked, and loving every minute of it. You want them to see you come?”

I groaned in response, unable to form words with each repeated thrust into me, pressing me further against the glass.

“Say it. Do you want to come, Miss Mills? Answer me or I’ll stop and make you suck me off instead,” he hissed, driving himself deeper and deeper inside me with every thrust.

“Yes… fuck yes… oh my god!” I exclaimed as my hands slammed against the glass, my entire body quaking from the orgasm that was rushing over me, leaving me gasping for air. When it finally subsided, he pulled out of me and spun me around to face him, his lips meeting mine again aggressively.

My hands found his hair and tugged at fistfuls of it, as our tongues slid against each other. I released one hand and brought it down to his throbbing erection

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between us and began stroking him briskly, causing his groans to echo in my mouth. I pulled away from his lips, staring at him with hooded eyes.

“Now I want all of Chicago to see your face as I make you come so hard you forget your name,” I growled, sliding down the glass and taking his entire cock in my mouth. His entire body tensed and he let out a deep moan, as my groan of pleasure from the mixture of my taste with his vibrated every delicious inch of him. I looked up at him, his palms and forehead rest on the glass, his eyes closed tight.

“Oh fuck… fuck, fuck, FUCK!” he shouted, as I felt his cock pulse against my lips. He began emptying into my mouth and I swallowed every drop. *A real woman isn’t afraid to swallow*, had always been my thought, and I had yet to disappoint a single man I had been with. And from his response, I could see that it was highly unlikely that any of these other little office groupies of his had ever done such.

Prissy bitches. *God where was this coming from?*

I released him from my mouth and he staggered back, falling into the chair, trying to calm his breathing. I stood up, pulling my skirt back down, and meeting his eyes. The seconds ticked by, neither of us looking away. Without saying a word I pulled the front of my torn shirt together and walked out, praying my shaky legs wouldn’t betray me.

Grabbing my purse from my desk I hit the power on my computer and threw my blazer on, trying desperately to fasten the button with my trembling fingers. Mr. Ryan still hadn’t come out, and I almost ran to the elevator praying to God it would get there before I had to face him again.

I couldn’t even let myself think about what happened until I was out of here. The doors opened and I pushed the button for the lobby, watching as each floor was counted down . The gold doors opened and I raced out and down the hall. I briefly heard the security guard say something about working late, but I just waved and sped past him.

With each step my body reminded me of the events of the last hour. As I reached my car I pressed the button on the alarm, pulled open the door and collapsed into the safety of the leather seats. I looked up and met my eyes in the rear view mirror.

What. The. Fuck. Was. That?

BOOK EXCLUSIVE

TWO – Beautiful Bitch

Holy shit. I am so fucking screwed. I'd been staring at my ceiling since I woke up thirty minutes ago.

Hard. *Again.* And this time was even worse than the 296 other times I had woken up this way. This time, I knew what I was missing.

Nine months. Nine fucking months of morning wood, and endless fantasies about someone I didn't even want. Well that wasn't completely true. I wanted her. I wanted her more than any women I'd ever seen. The big problem was I hated her. Well maybe not… no, I hated her. She was one of the biggest bitches I've ever met.

And she hated me too. I mean, she *really* hated me. In all my 28 years, I had never met someone who pushed my buttons like my assistant. Chloe. Well, Ms. Mills.

Just her name made my dick twitch. *Fucking traitor*. I stared down at my cock. He was the one that got me into this mess to begin with. I rubbed my hands across my face and sat up. What the fuck was I going to do? God, why couldn't I just keep it in my pants? I've managed it for nine fucking months.

And it had worked. I kept my distance, bossed her around, hell, even I'll admit I'd been a bastard. And then I just lost it. All it took was one moment, sitting in that quiet room, her smell all around me and that fucking skirt. I snapped.

She leaned over the table, her perfect ass on display in front of me. I couldn't do this anymore. I was harder than hell and every nerve in my body was screaming to reach out and touch. I just didn't have the fight left.

My hand moved of its own volition. It reached out for her, ignoring every argument I'd had with myself for almost a year. I said her name. Those brown eyes turned to look at me. But what was that look in her eyes? Was it anger. . lust? I couldn't bring myself to think about it anymore. .

My body took over. Eyes meeting. Waiting. Tell me no. Make me stop. My hand lower. Soft fabric. Under. Skin like satin. Don't let me do this. Up, slowly. Stop me. Lace. Heat. Wet. Heaven.

I threw her on the table; her legs open to me, her panties a ripped pile of expensive lace on the floor. I sunk two fingers inside, and the sound of her pleasure sent a thrill straight to my aching cock. I was so jealous of my fingers; I

wanted to be inside of her. Thrusting myself in and out, hearing her scream my name and punishing her for making me want her so badly.

My mind caught up with my body and I pulled away. She grabbed my tie, pulling me to her, telling me to finish what I started. Her lips crashed into mine, tasting me, taunting me. She was always taunting me. The way she looked, the way she smelled, even the way she laughed. I needed to be in control now. I grabbed her pretty shirt and ripped it open, the buttons flying about the room and her beautiful tits showing themselves to me at last.

Shaky hands came to my belt. Fumbling to open me up to her. She wanted this as much as I did. Rage boiled in me at that thought. How dare she act everyday like I was nothing, like she was too good for me? Every single day at work, she was so calm, so cold, and deep down she was just as turned on as I was. I felt myself getting even harder, battling the different emotions inside me. Her hand gripped me, squeezing me hard, and I throbbed at her touch.

Shit. This was getting me nowhere. I fucked her last night, hard. It should have been enough. I was sure that if I just had her once, the wanting would be over, and I'd finally have some peace. But here I was, in my bed, fucking throbbing like I haven't come in weeks. I looked at the clock, and it had only been nine hours. This was just sick. What was I, sixteen?

Closing my eyes, I lay back down and I let out a deep breath. Images of her fluttered behind my eyelids.

Pushing her skirt up, I was able to see her beautifully waxed pussy. When I had touched her, I noticed the lack of hair, but seeing it before me, made my muscles tighten and my dick twitch. Funny how something so simple can take you by surprise. I had imagined her pussy in every way imaginable, and finally seeing it had made me weak in the knees. I didn't give either of us any warning as I pushed into her. And fuck, if it wasn't everything I had dreamed of.

She was tight, and so wet, her legs above her, her ankles in my hands. I continued to pound in and out of her. I was going to fuck her out of me. Like an exorcism. Rid myself of this gorgeous demon that had taken hold of my will. Every day she had more power over me. She always appeared so prim and proper, but her body haunted my dreams. Her long dark hair, piled up on her head, her fucking haunting eyes, her face, her lips, her body. The way she dressed, the way she walked. Stealing my resolve, bit by bit, every day.

I taunted her, calling her out as the cocktease that she was. But she still mocked me, telling me she'd had better. Red-hot anger had surged through me. Lust overwhelmed my senses. I would erase every man from her memory. I

growled, throwing her to the window, ordering her to spread herself for me. I would humiliate her, show the world what she was like. I thrust into her, purging myself of this need, fucking her harder than I'd ever dreamed. Her moans and cries were the sweetest music I'd ever heard. I wanted her to say my name. To know that it was me making her feel this way. Her muscles began clenching around me, grabbing me, pulling me in. She screamed and swore and thrashed on the cold glass.

When she kissed me my mind became muddied, with every stroke of her tongue against mine, my body begged for her. Her hands in my hair, yanking and guiding left me wanting to beg her to touch me. She slid down the glass onto her knees in front of me. Her hot mouth enveloped me, drawing me in. God, how many times had I imagined her servicing me like this? All those times I'd watch her eat at her desk, imagining what it would be like. I wanted to fist my hands in her long hair, but I was paralyzed by the sensation. I was helpless to stop this. When she moaned around my cock, I felt every tremor of her voice vibrate against me. She sucked and licked and groaned and when I felt her teeth slide against me, I couldn't hold back anymore. My orgasm ripped through me as my come shot down her throat. And then she released me and I was left gasping and stumbling and shaken.

So many thoughts crashed through my mind. The things that we had done, the things I still wanted. I wanted to taste her, to see if she would be as delicious as she was in my dreams. I took a quick shower, scrubbing myself roughly as if to remove any trace of her that remained after last night. This was going to stop, this *had* to stop. Bennett Ryan did not act like this. Women threw themselves at me. I never chased anyone. Ever. I could have any woman I wanted, and I usually did.

But I certainly *did not* fuck around in my office. The last thing I needed was some clingy woman ruining everything. I couldn't allow her to have this control over me. Everything was so much better before I knew what I was missing. As torturous as that was, this was million times worse.

I was making my way into my office when she walked in. The way she had left last night, without a word, I figured one of two scenarios awaited me. Either she would be making eyes at me, thinking that last night meant something; that *we* meant something. Women were clingy that way. Or, she would have my ass. Literally.

If word got out about what we had done, not only could I lose my job, but everything my family and I had worked for. As much as I hated her though, I

couldn’t see her doing something like that. If there was one thing I had learned about her, it was that she was trustworthy and loyal. She might be a hateful shrew, but I didn’t think she would throw me to the lions. She had worked for Ryan Inc. since college, and was a very valued part of the company for a reason. Even if I was sick of listening to my dad tell me how lucky I was that she stuck around.

But I’ll be damned if she didn’t completely ignore my presence. She walked in wearing a knee length trench coat. It shielded what she wore while at the same time showing off those amazing legs, made to appear that much longer by the gold strap heels she was wearing. *Fuck me shoes.*

Oh shit… if she was wearing those shoes, there was a good chance…. *No, not that dress. Please, for the love of God, not that dress.* I knew for a fact there was no way I had the will power for that shit today.

Well, fuck me running, that woman really was the biggest cocktease in the entire world. It was the white dress. That dress was the bane of my existence, both my heaven and my hell wrapped in one fucking gorgeous package. It had a neckline that dipped down to accentuate the soft smooth skin of her neck and collarbone, the white fabric clinging perfectly to those gorgeous tits. The hem fell just below her knees and it was the sexiest thing I had ever seen. It wasn’t provocative in any way, but there was something about the cut and that virginal white, that gave me blue balls all day when she wore it. And she always wore her hair down when she wore it. One of my recurring fantasies was my taking her hair down before I fucked her. God, she pissed me off.

I glared at her as she hung the jacket on the back of her chair and sat down. When she still didn’t acknowledge me, I turned and stormed into my office, slamming the door behind me. Why the fuck was she still affecting me this way? Last night should have gotten her out of my system. But there I stood, with my second hard-on of the day, and it wasn’t even eight o’clock yet. *Shit*.

Work. I would just focus on work and stop thinking about her. I walked over to my desk and sat down, trying to direct my attention to anything but thoughts of how amazing those lips felt around my cock last night. *Not conducive, Ryan,* I mentally scolded myself. I flipped open my laptop to begin working on my schedule for the day. My schedule… shit, the bitch had it in her Blackberry. Hopefully I wasn’t missing any meetings this morning, because I was not calling the ice queen in here until I absolutely had to.

As I was going over a spreadsheet, a knock came at my door. “Come in,” I called out. An envelope being slammed down on my desk in front of me caught

my attention. I looked up to see Ms. Mills looking down at me with a defiantly crooked eyebrow, and without a word, her and her white dress turned and stormed out of my office, shutting the door roughly behind them. I reached across my desk to retrieve it; sure it was going to be some note about sexual harassment or some such shit.

What I didn't expect was an internet sales receipt from Gucci… on the company credit card. I shot up out of the chair and raced out of my office after her. She was headed for the stairwell. Good. We were on the 18th floor, and nobody, besides maybe the two of us, ever used the stairs. I could scream at her all I wanted and nobody would be the wiser.

"Ms. Mills, where do you think you're going?" I called out after her once the stairway door had closed behind the both of us.

She continued walking down the stairs without turning back to look at me. "We're out of coffee, *Mr. Ryan*," she sneered my name in the same venomous way she always did. "So I'm going downstairs to retrieve some. Can't have you missing out on your caffeine fix, *sir.* "

How could someone so fucking hot be such a fucking bitch? I caught up to her on the landing between floors and grabbed her arm, pushing her against the wall. Her eyes narrowed contemptuously at me, her teeth clenched in a hiss. I whipped the receipt up in front of her face as I glared back at her. "What the fuck is this?"

She shook her head sarcastically. "You know, for such a pompous know-it-all, you really are a stupid son of a bitch sometimes. What the hell does it look like? It's a receipt. You know, you get them whenever you go shopping."

Oh, if only she wasn't the best we had, she'd be on her way out the door right now. Who the hell did she think she was, speaking to me this way? "I can see that," I growled through my teeth, crumpling the paper as I clenched my fist. "Why are you making clothing purchases on your company credit card?"

She rolled her eyes and chuckled. "Some bastard tore my blouse," she replied casually. She shrugged her shoulders and then leaned her face closer to me and whispered. "*And* my panties."

Well, fuck.

I took a deep breath through my nose and threw the paper to the floor, crashing my lips against hers and thrusting my fingers into her hair, pinning her body against the wall with my own. My cock throbbed against her abdomen as I felt her hand come up to my hair, fisting it roughly. Pulling me closer. *This was so fucked up*. I pulled her dress up along her thighs and groaned into her mouth

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

as my fingers found the lace edge of her thigh highs again. She did this to torment me; she had to. I felt her tongue run over my lips as my fingertips brushed the warm and wet crotch of her panties. I clenched my hold around the fabric and gave it a rough tug. “Make that two,” I hissed and then pressed my tongue between her lips and into the depths of her mouth, sliding along hers.

She groaned deeply as I thrust two fingers inside of her immediately, and if it was possible, she was even wetter than she was last night. *Seriously fucked up situation we have going on here*. She broke away from my lips with a gasp as I fucked her hard with my fingers, my thumb rubbing vigorous circles on her clit. “On your knees,” she growled through clenched teeth, opening her eyes and glaring. “I want your mouth on me now.”

Fuck. Me. Did she just say what I think she did? God that was hot, and if possible my cock got even harder. So this bitch wanted to play games; I’d make her come so hard she’d forget her name. I knelt down on the floor, shoving her ripped panties into my jacket pocket and rested one heeled foot on my shoulder. I spread her lips with my fingers and teased her clit with my tongue, causing her hips to convulse slightly from the sensation and the anticipation of more. Without warning, I drove my tongue inside her; causing her to gasp loudly and reclaim my hair in her fists. Fuck she tasted amazing, and every last drop of this arousal was caused by me. Well, at least I wasn’t alone in this sick, twisted scenario. I tugged at her clit with my teeth causing her to growl obscenities under her breath, and then sucked it between my lips, flicking my tongue over it rapidly.

ABOUT EXCLUSIVE

“Shitfuckshit!” she hissed as the heel of her shoe dug into my shoulder and I felt her throbbing against my tongue in release. I moaned as she pulled my face flush against her pussy as she came.

Once her grip lightened on my hair slightly but her muscles still tense so I knew she hadn’t fully ridden it out, I released my mouth from her and stood up. She glared at me viciously but I made quick work of my belt and pants, releasing my throbbing cock from its confines and thrusting hard inside her. I heard her yelp and clench around me, her breath staggered and her arousal clearly reignited.

She bit into the shoulder of my jacket and wrapped her leg around me as I began screwing her hard and fast against the wall. Any moment someone could walk out into the stairwell and catch me fucking the hell out of her, and I could care less. I needed to get this bitch out of my system.

She lifted her head from my shoulder and once again, her lips collided with

mine roughly taking my bottom lip between her teeth. She was still clenched so tightly around me, as I kept her body on high; never allowing her to completely come down from her climax. At the same time, I felt euphoric friction on my cock that coaxed my own climax closer and closer to the surface. But not before this little bitch had the memory of me and what I was doing to her body imbedded in her mind. Then maybe I could get some peace from this.

"Fuck," she growled lowly as her walls clenched around me again and her leg tightened around me to pull me deeper.

I buried my face in her neck and hair to muffle the groan as I came hard and sudden inside her, squeezing her ass in my hands. Her leg slid slowly down mine as we both came down and tried regain our breathing. I pulled out of her and we both adjusted our clothes and she began smoothing her hair nonchalantly.

"Well, it's a good thing I'm on the pill," she replied calmly. She turned to continue down the stairs but stopped abruptly, spinning back to meet my eye. "Thanks for asking, asshole."

I watched her disappear out of sight down the stairs and growled as I stormed back to my office and slammed the door. I landed in my chair with a loud huff, rocking back and forth a few times; before removing her destroyed panties from my pocket. I stared at the white silk fabric between my fingers for a moment, before opening my desk drawer and dropping them in to join the pair from last night.

Holy shit. I really am so fucking screwed.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

THREE – WHO'S THE BOSS

How in the hell I made it down those stairs without killing myself is beyond me. I fled…plain and simple. I ran out of there like I was on fire, leaving Mr. Ryan alone in the stairwell slack-jawed, clothes askew, and hair standing on end like he'd been molested.

Clearing the final floor landing in a leap, which was no easy task in these shoes, I pushed open the metal door and leaned against the wall, panting. *What the fuck just happened?* Did I just fuck my boss on the stairs? Did he just go down on me? I gasped and my hands flew over my mouth. Did I *order* him to? *Oh, Shit.* What the hell was wrong with me?

Dazed, I stumbled away from the wall and into the closest restroom. The cafeteria supply was on the bottom floor, *thank God*, so it was fairly empty. Walking in, I did a quick check under all the stalls to make sure they were empty and then turned the lock on the main door. As I approached the bathroom mirror, I winced. Shit. I looked like I'd been ridden hard and put out to dry. I'd heard the term "freshly fucked" before, but didn't fully appreciate it until now.

My hair was a fucking nightmare. All my perfectly styled waves were now a mass of wild tangles.

Apparently Mr. Ryan liked my hair down. I hardly ever wore my hair that way, but I always did with this dress. Just thinking about how his hands felt gripping my hair as he kissed me, sent a tremor through my very recently well-worked girly parts. Huh, I shrugged; I would have to remember that for future reference. *What?* Where the hell did that come from? I most certainly would not. Ugg! I slammed my fist on the counter and moved closer to inspect the damage.

My lips were swollen, my makeup smudged, my dress was hanging on me haphazardly and I was once again missing my panties. *Son of a Bitch*. That was the second pair. Where the fuck were they anyway? *"Oh God!"* I said, panicked . They weren't laying in a pile in the conference room somewhere, were they? Maybe he picked them up and threw them away. I should ask him, I thought as I paced the bathroom floor. *Yea right. That wasn't happening.* I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of even acknowledging this…this…what the fuck was this?

I shook my head, scrubbing my face with my hands. God, I'd made a mess of things.

When I walked in this morning, I had a plan. I was going to walk in there,

throw that receipt in his pretty little face and tell him to fuck off. But then he'd looked so shit sexy in that suit, and his hair stuck up like a neon sign screaming "do me" and I just lost all coherent thought. I put the envelope down on his desk and walked out without a word. Pathetic. What was it about him that made my brain turn to mush and my panties wet?

This was not good. How in the fuck was I going to face him without imagining him naked? Okay, well not naked. I technically hadn't seen him completely naked yet, but what I had seen caused another tremor to run through me. Oh God. Did I just say "yet?"

So what was I going to do? I could quit. I thought about that for a minute and didn't like the way it felt. I loved my job, and Mr. Ryan might be a giant asstard but I'd dealt with that for 9 months. I loved it here and I hated to admit it, but I loved watching him work. Besides the obvious reasons, he really was a genius in the advertising world. His whole family was. And that was another thing. His family. Carlisle Ryan was the president of Ryan Inc., and like a father to me. My dad was back home in Washington, and when I started as a receptionist while still in college, he had been so nice to me.

They all had. His brother Emmett was another senior executive and was the nicest guy I'd ever met. I loved everyone here, so quitting was simply not an option.

With that decided, I knew I needed a plan of action. I just had to remain professional and make sure it never, *ever* happened again. Sure, this was by far the hottest, most intense sex I had ever had in my life. And maybe he played my body like an instrument, just one touch from him igniting all my senses and leaving my body screaming for more, but I was a strong, independent woman. My mind and body were not ruled by lust. I just had to remember what a jackass he was. He was a womanizing, arrogant, pig headed, spoiled brat. The world had been handed to him, and the only person he was concerned with was himself. He was a disgusting pig, and I hated everything he stood for. "Hmph," I huffed proud of myself, smiling into the mirror. Hell, this would be easier than I thought.

Feeling a new sense of determination, I straightened my dress, smoothed my hair the best I could, and marched pantiless out of the bathroom. I made quick work of retrieving the coffee I was after and headed back to my office, making sure to avoid the stairs.

Taking a deep breath, I opened the outer office door and stepped in. The door to Mr. Ryan's office was shut, and there was no noise coming from inside.

PROOF EXCLUSIVE

Maybe he stepped out. *Like I could get so lucky*.

Sitting in my chair, I pulled open my drawer and removed my cosmetic bag, fixing my makeup before getting to work. The last thing I wanted to do was face him, but if I didn't plan on quitting, it would have to be done eventually.

Opening up my calendar, I was relieved to see that I had somehow managed to back up the schedule and would only need to replace my Blackberry. Glancing through the appointment schedule, I noticed that had a presentation to give to the other partners on Monday. I grimaced when I realized this meant I would have no choice but to talk to him today. He also had a convention in Seattle next month, which meant not only would I have to be in the same hotel as him, but the plane, the company car, and any meetings that came up as well. No, no awkwardness there at all.

For the next hour or so as I worked, I found myself glancing up at his door. And each time I did, the butterflies in my stomach started to flutter. This was ridiculous! What the fuck was wrong with me? I slammed the file shut I was looking through and dropped my head into my hands when I heard his door open.

Mr. Ryan walked out, not meeting my eyes. His clothes had been straightened, his overcoat slung over his arm and his briefcase in hand, but his hair was still the crazy mess I had left him with. "I'm leaving for the rest of the day, Miss Mills," he all but barked at me, "Cancel my appointments and make any necessary adjustments."

He was almost out the door when I came to my senses. "Mr. Ryan," I said coolly, bringing him to a stop, his hand resting on the door. "You and the partners have a presentation on Monday at 10:00 a.m.," I said to his back. He stood still as a statue, his muscles tensed while never meeting my eyes.

"The spreadsheets, portfolios and slide materials will be set up in the conference room by 9:30 Monday morning." I was kind of enjoying this. There was nothing about his posture that screamed

"comfortable." He nodded curtly and started to make his way out the door again when I stopped him again. "And Mr. Ryan?" I added, a touch of sarcasm in my voice. "I need your signatures on these expense reports before you leave."

His shoulders dropped slightly and he exhaled a deep breath, spinning on his heel to make his way to my desk. Never meeting my eyes, he leaned over and flipped through the forms. Standing opposite him, I placed a pen on the desk before him. "Please, sign where the tabs are, *sir.* "

PROOF COPY

His hand stopped mid-signature and he slowly raised his chin, bringing his green eyes in line with my own. Our eyes locked for what seemed like minutes, neither of us looking away; the only sounds the tick of the large art deco clock on the wall and our uneven breaths. His nostrils flared and his jaw clenched as his eyes bore into mine. My nipples hardened and my heart sped up, and for a brief moment I had an irresistible urge to lean in and suck on his pouty bottom lip.

“Don’t forward my calls,” he spit out, quickly signing the last form and turning to leave without a word.

“Bastard,” I sneered to myself as I watched him disappear out the door.

To say my weekend sucked, would be putting it mildly. I hardly ate, I hardly slept and what little sleep I did get was interrupted by images of white hot sexual escapades in various locations and stages of undress. Saturday morning, I awoke in a frustrated and bad mood, but managed to somehow get my shit together and take care of housework and grocery shopping, along with all the other various mundane tasks that filled everyday life.

Sunday morning however, I was not so lucky. I woke with a start, panting and trembling; my body sweaty and twisted in a mass of white cotton sheets. The dream I had was so intense, it had actually brought me to orgasm. We had been on the conference table again, but this time we were both completely naked. He was on his back, my legs straddling him, my body bouncing up and down on his cock. His hands running everywhere; along the sides of my face, down my neck, across my breasts and to my hips where he guided my movements.

ERIN LOVE EXCLUSIVE

“Shit,” I groaned as I pulled myself out of bed. This was going from bad to worse quickly. I mean I’d always had fantasies about the man. He was fucking gorgeous, but his personality had always been such a turn off. Who would have thought his being an angry jackass would result in me getting fucked up against a window? And liking it. Shit, this train of thought was not helping.

Walking into the bathroom, I started the shower. But standing there, waiting for the water to warm, my thoughts began to drift again. His pretty hair between my legs, his eyes looking up at me as he licked and sucked, the look of lust as we fucked, and the sound of his voice when he screamed in release. God I was so screwed.

I showered and dressed quickly, leaving me just enough time to meet Angela and Alice for brunch.

Angela I got to see every day at work, but Alice, whom I’d been best friends

with since Jr. High, had a tougher schedule to work into. She was a buyer for Gucci, and was my main supplier to feed my fashion addiction. Thanks to her and her amazing discounts, I owned some of the most beautiful clothes money could buy. I still paid a pretty penny for them, but it was worth it. My mother's family was well off, and I made incredible money at Ryan Inc., but even I couldn't spend $1900 on a dress and not want to kill myself. Sometimes I thought Carlisle paid me so well because he knew I was the only one who could handle his son. Oh, if only he knew.

I decided that it would be a bad idea to talk to the girls about what was going on. I mean, Angela worked for his brother, and saw Mr. Ryan around the building all the time. Besides that, she was a terrible liar. One smirk from him and she would go weak in the knees and start spilling her life story and mine. Alice on the other hand, would kick my ass. For almost a year she'd listened to me complain about what a dick he was, and she would not be happy to find out I was fucking him.

Two hours later I was sitting with my two best friends, drinking Mimosa's on the patio of our favorite restaurant; talking about men and clothes and work. Alice had surprised me with a brand new Gucci dress that I had been eyeing, the purchase made possible by her 60% discount. It was a chocolate brown wrap dress, made of the most sumptuous fabric I'd ever felt. It sat in a garment bag slung over the chair next to me, along with my brand new blackberry I'd picked up at the mall.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

"So how is work going, Chloe?" Alice asked between bites of her melon. "That douche of a boss still giving you a hard time? What was that name you had for him? Bastard or something?'

"It's Beautiful Bastard." Angela corrected, trying to stifle her laughter. I glared at her, willing her to stop. "God you should see him, Alice. It is the most perfect nickname I have ever heard. He is a god.

And I mean that. There's nothing wrong with him, physically. Perfect face, body, clothes, hair… oh god, the hair. It looks like he just banged the hell out of someone." She leaned over in her chair laughing and I rolled my eyes, but couldn't keep the corners of my mouth from lifting.

"But that's not all," she said, wiping tears from her eyes, "He is the biggest dick I've ever met. I mean, I wanted to let the air out of his tires within the first 15 minutes of meeting him."

"God. Is that true Chloe?" Alice asked, her blue eyes practically popping out of her head.

“Yea, pretty much. He is gorgeous, and he’s the biggest fucker I’ve ever met. I don’t know what the hell his problem is.” I said nonchalantly. This really wasn’t a conversation I wanted to have right now.

“Well,” Alice said, shrugging her shoulders and taking a long sip of her drink, “Maybe he’s pissed off because he’s got a small dick.”

I slumped into my chair as my two friends howled in fits of laughter. That was most certainly *not* his problem.

Monday morning, I was a bundle of nerves as I made my way into the building. I had made my decision; I wasn’t going to sacrifice my job because of our lack of judgment. I had worked hard to rise up to where I was, and I was stronger than that. I would just deal with the situation at hand, and move forward.

Feeling the need for a boost of confidence, I wore the new dress Alice had given me. It hugged my every curve without looking too provocative. But my secret weapon was my underwear. I’d always had a thing for expensive lingerie. Wearing something sexy under my clothes was empowering, and the pair I had on would most certainly do the trick. They were black tulle, embellished with embroidery and the back consisted of a series of delicate tulle ribbon, crisscrossing to meet in the center near my tailbone with a dainty black bow. They left almost my entire bottom bare and were incredibly sexy. With each step, the soft jersey of my dress caressed my bare skin, giving me a sense of sensuality and confidence. I could take whatever that ass had to say today, and I could dish it right back to him.

I arrived early to have time to prepare for the presentation. The reception area was mostly empty, as I made my way through the elaborate lobby. The wide space was opened three stories up and gleamed with polished granite flooring and travertine walls. As the elevator doors closed behind me, I gave myself a mental pep talk. Recounting all the arguments we had had and the jackass comments that he’d directed at me, I steeled my resolve. I could do this. That bastard had picked the wrong chick to mess with, and I’d be damned if I would let him intimidate me. I lowered my hand to my ass and smiled wickedly… .*power panties*.

As I had expected, the office was still empty when I arrived. Gathering all the materials I would need, I headed to the conference room to set up. Ahh…the scene of the crime. Glancing around the large and sun filled room; I slowly walked in, setting the files and folders on the large conference table. I let my fingers brush against the smooth wood, thinking of the last time I had touched it.

I shook my head slightly, trying clear it, and began setting up the room.

Twenty minutes later the proposals were set out, the projector was set up and refreshments were ready. With several minutes to spare I found myself wandering over to the window. Reaching out I touched the smooth glass, overwhelmed by the sensations it brought; the heat of his body against my back, the feel of the cool glass against my lace covered breasts and the raw animalistic sound of his voice in my ear. I closed my eyes and leaned in, pressing my palms and forehead against the window and let the power of the memories overtake me.

I was startled from my fantasy by a throat clearing behind me. “Mr. Ryan,” I gasped, spinning around. Our eyes locked momentarily and I was once again struck by how beautiful he was. Breaking eye contact with me, his gaze swept around the room.

“Ms. Mills,” he said, his voice curt, “I will be giving the presentation to the other executives on the 4th floor.”

“Excuse me?” I asked, not hiding the shock in my voice. “Why would you do that? We always use this room. And why did you wait till the last minute to tell me?”

“Because, Ms. Mills,” he added, leaning on his fists on the table, “*I* am the boss. *I* make the rules, and *I* decide when and where things happen. Maybe if you weren’t daydreaming out windows, you would have time to do your job. Do you think you can manage that, *Ms. Mills*?” He continued to stare at me, daring me to strike back.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

That rotten son of a bitch. Where was the duck tape when you needed it? White hot images of me ripping his throat out and taking a baseball bat to his shiny black sports car filled my mind. It took every bit of control I had not to jump across the table and strangle him. A smug smile crept over his face; and with each passing moment of my silence he grew more and more pleased with himself.

Ohhh…so this was how it was going to be. Well two could certainly play at this game. “Oh of course, *Mr. Ryan.* Don’t you worry about a thing.” I goaded, smiling sweetly at him. “Nothing in this room ever takes longer than a few minutes anyway.”

Well, that wiped the smug look right off his face. He opened his mouth as if to respond and snapped it shut again. Fists clenched tightly at his side, he almost appeared to be trembling with rage. In all the time I worked for him, I‘d never

seen him so visibly angry; and I was enjoying every minute of it.

We stood facing each other, separated by the large table; crackling electricity filling the room. Once again, he opened his mouth as if to speak, but changed his mind. And without a word, he turned quickly, storming out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

I was unable to control the laughter that bubbled up from my chest. Who did that prick think he was dealing with? Once again I reached down, patting my ass and smiled… *power panties*. Feeling literally drunk with power, I made quick work of gathering everything up, placing the items in a box and made my way to the elevator.

Turning the corner as I entered the room, my eyes immediately met Mr. Ryan's. Sitting in his chair, his hands tented in front of him, it was apparent by the scowl on his face that he was still angry. But my attention soon wandered to the person beside me. "Here let me help you with that, Chloe," he said in a pleasant, fatherly voice while giving his son a reproachful glare.

"Thank you, Mr. Ryan." I said gratefully, as he took the heavy box from my hands.

"Chloe, he said, a sincere smile on his face, "How many times do I need to ask you to call me Carlisle?"

He placed the box on the conference room table and pulled a seat out next to his son. Carlisle was every bit as handsome as his both his sons. Tall and thin, yet muscular, they shared the same chiseled features. His blonde hair was graying slightly at the temples but he was still one of the most handsome men I'd ever met.

"I'm sorry, Carlisle," I replied happily. "How is Esme doing?" A smile lit up his face as he thought of his wife.

"Fine, she's doing fine. She keeps bugging me about having you over though," he added with a wink. It did not escape my attention that Mr. Ryan snorted quietly and rolled his eyes.

"Soon. I promise." I added with a nod of my head. "Give her my love."

Hearing loud footsteps behind me, I was not surprised to feel a warm kiss placed on my cheek, causing me to giggle. "Good morning, Chloe," Emmett said as he entered the room. "Sorry I'm late guys. I guess I thought we were meeting up on your floor."

I chanced a smug look out of the corner of my eye, meeting Mr. Ryan's gaze.

EBOOKEXCLUSIVE

Looking away I smiled widely at Emmett as I began passing the presentation materials around the table. “And good morning to you, Mr. Ryan. How is your beautiful wife doing?”

“Chloe,” he groaned. “Please call me Emmett. Mr. Ryan is my dad. And that ornery fart over there.” He pointed towards his brother, who sat up and glared at him in return. “And Rose is perfect as usual.

She wants you to introduce her to that friend of yours that works for that fancy designer.” He said as he pulled out a chair.

“Oh, Alice? Of course, Emmett. Let her know I’ll give her a call sometime this week.” I added handing him his documents.

Moving down the table I stopped and placed the final presentation booklet in front of my jackass boss. “Here you are, Mr. Ryan,” I said coolly.

Without so much as a glance, he began going through his papers. “Ms. Mills.” He answered in return.

“Make sure the projection equipment is up and ready before you get the coffee.” *Well there would be no “Call me Bennett” coming from him today. Dick.*

Just as I was turning to leave, Emmett’s boisterous voice stopped me. “Oh Chloe, while I was up there waiting, I found these on the floor.” Glancing down, I saw 2 antiqued silver buttons sitting in his large palm. “Would you ask around and see if anyone of the other assistants has lost these? They look kind of expensive. And how in the hell does someone loose two buttons from a shirt and not notice?” he said, chuckling and shaking his head.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

It might have been just me, but I swear the breath left me in an audible gasp. I had completely forgotten about the buttons. “Um…yea…sure, Emmett.” I stuttered out.

“Emmett, can I see those for a minute?” Jackass suddenly chimed in, taking the buttons from his brother.

“Why Ms. Mills,” he said, a wicked smirk in place, “Don’t you have a blouse with buttons like this?

And as I recall, I mean, I’m no expert, but it seems it was rather expensive.” I glanced quickly around the room; Emmett and Carlisle seemed to be tuning out the majority of the conversation, unaware of the episode unfolding in front of them.

Mr. Ryan stood up, walking around the table. Taking my hand, he ran a finger from the inside of my arm to my hand, placing the buttons in my palm and

closing it around them. My breath caught in my throat and my heart pounded loudly against my chest. I felt my nipples harden and my throat suddenly felt dry. Leaning in closely, his breath hot on my ear, he whispered, “I mean I would hate to think of having such a beautiful piece of clothing ruined. You really should try and be more careful.”

I attempted to maintain a calm demeanor as I lowered my hand from his. “Thank you, *Mr*. Ryan,” I replied through ground teeth, before he pulled away. I quickly set up the projector and I took my seat as he began the meeting. *That no good son of a bitch. What was he playing at?* It would only take a moment of notice from his father and brother to overhear something, and put two and two together.

Regardless of how good I was at my job, fucking my boss in conference rooms and stairwells was not going to help my career.

Throughout the meeting we cast glances at each other; mine fueled with anger and his with smug cockiness. He was damn good at what he did too and he knew it. *Too damn good*. I looked down at the spread sheets in front of me as much as possible to avoid looking at him. As soon as the meeting was over, I gathered my things as fast as I could and got the hell out of there. But as expected, he was hot on my tail all the way to the elevator until we were both seething silently in the back on our way up to the office.

I stood in the elevator in front of Mr. Ryan, positively livid at the mockery he had made of me in the conference room. Why wouldn’t this elevator hurry up, and why did someone on every floor decide they needed to use it *now*? By the time we reached the eleventh floor, the elevator was almost to full capacity. When the door opened and three more people decided to squeeze in, I was pushed farther into him, my back against his chest and my ass against his…. oh my…

I felt the rest of his body stiffen subtly and heard him take a sharp breath; and even though my clit was tingling at the contact of our bodies, I couldn’t help but smirk. *Payback’s a bitch, asshole.*

By the fourteenth floor, there was just enough elbowroom to move and I allowed one of the folders to slip from my hold. “Oops, pardon me, Mr. Ryan. I dropped something,” I said quietly and began lowering myself to the floor slowly, allowing my body to rub firm against his raging erection. I bit back my smirk as I repeated my motions on the way back up, his cock resting against my ass again.

Thanks for the heels, Alice, I thought to myself as I discreetly pressed against

him. “So sorry about that, sir.”

He pressed back against me and I could barely contain my gasp. *No, Chloe. You’re not going to allow him to affect you this way anymore,* I mentally scolded myself. But as I felt the entire length of him pressed against me, I felt the warmth spread between my legs. It was time to bring him to his knees and then smirked at the memory that sparked. A vicious little thought popped into my mind. But could I do it? I chanced a glance back at him, and he glared at me. Oh yea, I could so do this.

We reached the 15th floor and a few more people filed out. Stepping away from him slightly, I looked back at him to make sure I had his attention. Sure enough, his gaze was settled right on my ass.

Perfect. Taking a deep breath I slid my hand down to the hem of my dress, lifting it exposing my little black panties. I heard him gasp and I smiled smugly, lowering my dress as the elevator doors opened.

The 16th floor. More people exited, and once again, I lifted my skirt. Glancing back once again to see his eyes were right where I wanted them. His lower lip was between his teeth, and his breathing had most definitely picked up. A large man in front of me chose that moment to step back, sending me backwards once again into Bennetts’s body. Hard. My practically bare ass made direct contact with his cock. Reaching out to keep me from falling, he pulled me to him and stifled a groan. This was so fun. I was tempted to taunt him. *How you like it now, asshole? Not so fun being played with is it?*

“God, I am so clumsy, Mr. Ryan.” I said glancing up at him. His eyes were closed tightly and his face was flushed. “Are you feeling okay, sir? You look like you might have a fever.” He opened his eyes to look down at me, and I suddenly wondered if this was such a good idea. Clearing my throat I looked around, there were only 5 people in the elevator with us and only two floors to go. The door opened again and the last ones stepped out. One more floor to go and I could strut out of here, leaving him and his lethal wood behind.

As soon as the doors closed and the elevator began to move, I heard a growl from behind me and caught a quick sudden movement as Mr. Ryan slammed his hand against the stop button on the control panel. His eyes turned on me and they were deeper green than I had ever seen them. “Bad move, Ms. Mills,” he sneered, and in one fluid motion, his body came to mine, pinning me against the wall of the elevator and crashing his lips against mine. Our tongues battled, our moans filling the silent space. Pulling away from me he glared, “Don’t move.” And even though I wanted to tell him to fuck off, my body begged me to do

whatever he said.

Reaching over to my discarded files, he plucked a post it note off and placed it on the camera lens set into the ceiling. A shiver of anticipation shot through me, battling with my constant urge to stop this…this *thing* between us. I had never been so torn before. I didn't want this with him, but every nerve inside me was screaming for his touch. There was absolutely no denying how he made me feel.

He returned to me, his lips once again taking possession of mine, and an involuntary groan rumbled in my throat as his hardened cock pressed against my stomach. My body began acting on instinct and my leg wrapped around his, pressing me closer against his arousal, my hands finding their way to his hair. After a moment of ravaging each other's mouths, he pulled away and his fingers nimbly flicked the clasp at my waist, my dress flowing apart in front of him.

"Very, *very* bad move," he seethed through his teeth. Placing his hands on my shoulders, he looked into my eyes and slid the fabric to the floor. His hands took mine, turning me around, bringing them up and pressing my palms against the wall. There I stood with my back to him, in nothing but my under garments, and as he ground into me I felt the traitorous moisture pooling in my panties.

Reaching up, he removed the silver comb from my hair letting it fall down my naked back. He fisted it in his hands and roughly pulled my head to the side, giving him access to my neck. Hot, wet kisses rained down my spine and across my shoulders. His touch left a spark of electricity all the way down my back, over every inch of skin he touched. I felt his hands grab my ass and squeeze, his breath hot and heaving in my ear. "Very naughty girl."

I yelped out in surprise as I felt his hand come hard against my ass, and my only response was a moan of pleasure. *What the fuck was he doing to me? I would never do these things.* Yet here I was, panting heavily at his rough touch. I breathed in another sharp gasp as his hands clasped the scant material on my ass and yet again, ripped it off.

"Expect another bill, asshole."

He chuckled darkly at my breathy growl, and I heard him draw in a slow breath through his nose as his body pressed up against mine again, the cool wall against my breasts sending shivers through my body. "Worth every penny.". *Shit, there goes another delicious shiver.* His hand slid around my waist and down my abdomen, slipping lower until his finger rest on my clit. "You know, Ms. Mills, I think you wore those just to tease me." The pressure from his touch caused me to ache, his fingers pressing and releasing, leaving me wanting. The need inside me was building, desperately needing him to move. "You like to fuck with me, don't

you? You little cocktease.” Moving his hand lower, his fingers stopped right at my entrance, the heel of his hand now moving slowly against my swollen clit.

“Fuck you.” I groaned. His long fingers circled around my entrance, taunting me, each movement sending a moan through me.

“Oh, you want me to fuck you don’t you? My cock slamming in and out of you, making you come all over me. You want that don’t you, you little tease?” I moaned as his finger finally entered me, pressing me back into him. “Say it, Ms. Mills. Say it and I’ll give you what you want.” A second finger joined the first, and the sensation caused me to cry out. I shook my head, but my body seemed to betray me. I closed my eyes, trying to clear my thoughts, but everything was just too much. The feel of his clothed body against my naked skin, the sound of his rough voice, and the feeling of his long fingers plunging in and out of me had me teetering on the edge. His other hand reached up, firmly pinching my nipple through the sheer fabric of my bra, and I moaned loudly. I was so close. “Say it!”

He grunted into my ear as his thumb rolled over my clit.

“God, yes.” I groaned finally. “I want you to fuck me.” He let out a low, strangled moan and his forehead rest on my shoulder. His fingers began moving faster, plunging and circling, and he was fucking me with his hand. His hips ground against my ass, his hard cock rubbing against me. “Oh God,” I moaned, the coil tightening deep inside me, my every thought focused on the pleasure begging to break free.

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The rhythmic sounds of our panting and groans were suddenly silenced by the shrill ringing of a phone. We stilled as the realization of where we were entered our consciousness. I heard a curse escape his mouth and he moved away from me. Panting, I turned to find him reaching for the phone inside the control panel. Grabbing my dress from the floor, I slipped it on my shoulders, and began fastening it with shaking hands.

“Yes.” He spoke into the phone, our eyes locked across the elevator. “I see… No, we’re fine…” he bent over slowly removing my torn and discarded panties from the elevator floor. “No it just stopped.” He continued, rubbing the fabric between his fingers. “That’s fine.” He finished, hanging up the phone. I tried like hell to calm my breathing, but every part of my body was still aching for release.

The elevator jerked as it slowly began ascending again. He looked down at the lace in his hand and then back to me. Closing his eyes, he brought the fabric to his nose and inhaled deeply. He opened them again slowly, and meeting my gaze once again, he smirked, stepping away from the wall and stalking towards me. Placing one hand on the wall next to my head, he leaned in and whispered in my

ear, “You smell as good as you taste.” A shuttered breath escaped me, “And these,” he spoke, motioning to my panties in his hand, “are mine.”

The elevator chimed as we stopped at our floor. The doors opened and without another word, he slipped the fabric into the pocket of his suit jacket and walked out.

Well I guess I knew where all my underwear had gone.

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FOUR – La Perla

Panic. The emotion gripping me as I all but sprinted to my office could only be described as pure panic. I can't believe I let myself slip again. Being alone with her in that tiny steel prison; her smell, her sounds, her touch; had me once again under her power. Sure, I may have seemed calm and collected on the outside, even smug and in control, but every part of me was unraveling. This woman had a hold on me unlike anything I'd ever experienced.

Finally in the relative safety of my office, I collapsed on the leather sofa. Leaning forward, with my elbows on my knees, I gripped my hair tightly, willing myself to calm and my erection to subside.

"Fuck!" I exclaimed to the empty room. Things were going from bad to worse, and I knew it.

I knew from the minute she reminded me of this morning's meeting that there was no way in hell I could form one coherent thought, let alone give an entire presentation in that fucking conference room. And forget sitting at that table ever again. I'd never be able to sit at that thing without remembering what it was like to have her spread out before me as I fucked her. Walking in there to find her leaning up against the glass, deep in thought, was enough to make my dick twitch. But by the time she turned and I saw that sexy chocolate brown dress, the same warm brown as her eyes, and that blush from having been caught daydreaming, I had a full blown hard on.

BROKEN ALIVE

I'd made up some bullshit story about the meeting being moved to a different floor, and of course she called me on it. Why did she always have to antagonize me? So being the dick that I am, I made a point of reminding her of who was in charge. But did it work? Hell no. Like every other argument we'd ever had, she threw it right back in my face. But not just that, she insinuated that my *performance* had been less than satisfactory. She sure as hell didn't sound unsatisfied the other night on the table, or up against the window, or in the stairwell for that matter. *Fuck.* This was not helping.

So when she'd finally made her way down to the conference room, I was ready. I'd be damned if I'd let her have the upper hand when Emmett walked in with those buttons, even though I knew I really shouldn't do this in front of them, I could only focus on my opportunity to get even.

And she positively seethed throughout the entire presentation and then booked

out of the room.

Served her right for thinking that she could go toe to toe with me. But then that fucking elevator…

I jumped slightly as the sound of a loud thud in the outside office distracted me from my thoughts.

Followed by another one. And yet another. What the hell was going on out there? I stood up from the couch and made my way to the door, and I opened it to find Ms. Mills slamming folders and such a little harder than necessary on her desk. I folded my arms and leaned against the doorframe, watching her for a moment. The sight of her so flustered was not in the slightest way easing the throbbing in my cock. "Ms. Mills, can I see you in my office. *Now*."

She turned her head to look at me and narrowed her eyes slightly. "But of course, *Mr. Ryan*," she snapped sassily but in that honey sweet tone that brought my blood to a boil as she sashayed by me into my office.

I pushed the door closed roughly and walked toward her. "Would you mind telling me what your problem is?"

"Why don't you check your pocket, *sir*," she sneered and then roughly shoved her hands against my chest, knocking me off balance, and I landed on the couch as she quickly straddled my legs. Her lips crashed against mine in a furious assault and I felt myself harden more as she ground against me.

"Any more questions?"

My only response was a deep growl in my throat as I grabbed her ass and pulled her more firmly against me, grinding my clothed cock against her bare pussy. She began stroking me with the movements of her hips and my head fell back against the couch. This woman was going to be the death of me; any resolve I might have had was now completely gone.

"I think we have some unfinished business that requires our immediate attention, Mr. Ryan," she said in a gravelly and sultry voice I had never heard from any woman, let alone her. She tugged at my bottom lip with her teeth before standing up off of me, and I opened my eyes to watch her walk across the room to the door. *That bitch is going to walk out that door after that?* The click of the lock took me by surprise, and when she locked eyes with me, I was almost entranced by the fury and lust raging in those chocolate depths. "Appears that you have a problem there, sir," she growled as her gaze flickered between my eyes and the bulge in my pants. *Fucking little cocktease.*

I gave a deep growl and grabbed onto her waist, laying her down roughly on

the couch and bringing my finger to circle her entrance; taunting her. “Appears you do as well, Ms. Mills,” I replied huskily as I shoved a finger inside her, coaxing a groan from her. I leaned down to kiss her forcefully and held her lip between my teeth as I retracted my hand. “But I don’t fuck in my office.”

“Bullshit,” she growled back in frustration, her voice thick with arousal. “You’re gonna do *something* and finish what you started.”

I felt her hands come to my hair and she pushed my face down between her legs. The scent of her arousal was intoxicating and before another thought could pass through my mind, I took her swollen clit between my lips. I watched her beautiful tits rise and fall sharply with her gasping breaths as I ran my tongue in slow teasing motions along her sensitive flesh. I felt her calf moving against my cock, causing it to throb painfully. Never ceasing my ministrations, my hand made quick work of my belt and pants. When I finally removed my mouth from her clit, I ground my now unconfined cock against her ankle. “If I remember correctly, Ms. Mills; *I* actually didn’t start this. I think perhaps you should finish what *you* started.”

She opened her eyes and sneered at me, and without a word swung her legs around so that her head was now in my lap. She ran her tongue tauntingly along the underside of my cock once and her smoldering eyes met mine. “Now why would I do something like that?”

I raised an eyebrow at her and reached my hand down between her legs and quickly flicked her clit once, causing her to yelp slightly from the sensitivity of it. “I don’t get off, neither do you.”

“Why you egotistical…” she growled again until I cut her off by lowering myself onto my side and tugging her clit once with my lips. “Fuck you.”

For a split second, I once again thought she was going to get up and leave, and part of me wished she would. But a moment later, when her lips closed around my cock, every trace of that thought disappeared. Damn it, why did this have to feel so damn good? Her hand came to my cock below her lips and moved in the same frenzied motion as her mouth. “Ah shit,” I hissed and closed my lips around her pussy, holding her thighs on either side of my face.

Both of our hips began grinding against each other’s faces, anxious for release. Her legs spread slightly and I slid my hand around her thigh to push my finger inside her again. Her moan vibrated my dick and I nearly came right there. And from the trembling in her legs, it was obvious that she was close as well. I added another finger and began swiftly fucking her with my hand as my tongue and lips provided just enough suction and pressure to cause her to speed up her

motions on my cock.

Her legs slowly spread more, pressing her more firmly against my face; until I finally heard her muffled shriek as she fell over the edge. Her hips twitched against me as I increased my movements, driving her nerves insane, and I knew my release was only seconds off.

“Chloe?” I heard my father’s voice outside my door, and just as I was about to come, she shot up off the couch. A knock sounded on my door as she smoothed out her dress and I adjusted myself back into my pants. “Bennett?”

Perfect timing, Dad, I grumbled internally as I stood up and made my way over to my desk and sat down. My dick was seriously aching now, though you would think my father’s voice would cause an insta-shrink, but I’d been hard since I saw her at the window this morning. This was just getting ridiculous.

She gave me a triumphant smirk to which I returned a glare as she unlocked the door and opened it.

“Mr. Ryan, I mean, Carlisle. I was just leaving.”

I watched my father’s face fall in concern as he looked at her. “Chloe, dear. Are you feeling alright? You look a little flushed.”

I watched as she brought her hand up to her head and cleared her throat. “You know, I’m really not feeling that well, actually. It’s been a long morning,” she looked over at me with a mischievous stare that would be overlooked by the casual observer. “I’m actually going to take the rest of the day off, Mr. Ryan. Regain my strength.”

You fucking bitch, I wanted to scream at her, but had to hold it inside since my father was in the room.

I clenched my fists under my desk; I wasn’t sure who hated her worse, me or my balls. “You do have that big project, you know,” I snarled at her.

“It can be put off for a day,” she shrugged casually in return.

“I was expecting results today, Ms. Mills,” I gritted warningly through clenched teeth.

My father turned his gaze to me. “I’m sure you can handle whatever needs to be done, Bennett.” *Not helping, Dad. Really not helping.* He turned back to her with that soft fatherly smile. “You go on ahead, dear.”

“Thank you, Carlisle,” she replied with a sweet smile and then turned back to me with a curt nod. “Mr. Ryan.”

I watched her walk out and my father closed the door behind her and then

turned to look at me almost scoldingly. “What?” I asked in frustration as I discreetly shifted my hips after watching her ass as she walked away.

“It wouldn’t kill you to be a little nicer to her, Bennett,” he moved forward and sat on the corner of my desk. “You’re lucky to have her, you know.”

I rolled my eyes and shook my head. “If her personality were as appealing as her brain, we wouldn’t have a problem.”

He cut me off with his glare and I leaned back in my chair in defeat. “You were raised better than this, Bennett,” he said sternly and then stood up again. “Anyway, your mother called and told me to remind you about dinner tonight at the house. Emmett and Rose are coming over with the baby tonight.”

I felt the corner of my mouth twitch at the mention of my niece, but I simply nodded to my father.

“Yes, I’ll be there.”

He made his way over to the door and looked back at me before closing the door. “Don’t be late; you know your mother hates that.”

“I won’t, I promise!” I replied, slightly annoyed as he closed the door chuckling. He knew as well as anyone that I couldn’t stand being late for anything, even something as simple as family dinner.

Emmett on the other hand would be late to his own funeral. But now with all this work in front of me, left behind by *her*, I had no idea how I was going to get out of here on time; not to mention the additional chore she left behind that would consume my lunch hour. I needed to put her out of my mind any way I could. I reached into my pocket and pulled out what remained of her underwear; ready to discard them into my drawer with the others, when I noticed the tag. *Agent Provocateur.*

Granted, they didn’t *look* like cheap panties, but these weren’t exactly Fredericks of Hollywood quality either. She dropped a pretty penny on these. And it sparked my curiosity. I opened my drawer to examine the other two pair. La Perla tags on those. Damn, this woman was serious about her underwear. Maybe I should pop into the La Perla store downtown sometime and at least see how much my little collection is costing her. I ran my free hand through my hair and tossed them all back in the drawer slamming it shut. That was the last thing I needed to be thinking about.

As hard as I tried, I could not focus on a damn thing all day. Even after my lunchtime ritual, I still could not get my mind past the morning’s events. And by three, I was a wreck and knew I just had to get out of there. I reached the

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elevator and groaned slightly, opting for the stairs instead. Though that was not much better; just not as fresh in my memory.

Pulling up to my parent's home later that evening, I immediately felt some of my tension slip away.

Walking into the kitchen, I was accosted by the smells of my moms cooking, and the happy chatter and laughter of my parents coming from the dining room.

"Bennett," My mom sang as I stepped into the room. I bent down and kissed her cheek and allowed her to try and fix my unruly hair. "That hair of yours," she teased lovingly. "Still as wild as when you were little."

"I know, mom," I said grinning at her; this was the same conversation we always had. "I just gave up trying." I grabbed a large bowl from her to place on the table, snatching a carrot before setting it down and chuckling when she caught me. "Where's my girl?" I asked looking out towards the living room.

"They're not here yet," answered my dad as he walked in. "You know your brother, he's always late."

Of course I knew. Emmett was bad enough; but throw in his wife and daughter and he was lucky to even make it out of the house, let alone be on time.

"Well, they better hurry," I added, stealing another carrot and dodging as my mother swiped at my hand, "I don't get to spend enough time with her as it is and I'm feeling greedy tonight."

"Oh, Bennett, you are so cute with her," My mom started and I could here it coming. "And I know you don't want to hear it, but if you would just settle down, you could have little ones of your own running around." My glare stopped that train of thought in its tracks, and she continued setting the table.

Twenty minutes later, the sounds of chaos came from the foyer, and I rushed in to meet them. My knees were immediately pummeled by a small, unstable body with a toothy grin attached. "Wuncle Weddie!" The little grin squealed.

"CareBear!" I squealed right back at her, picking the little girl up and smothering her cheeks with kisses.

"God, you're disgusting," Emmett groaned as he walked past me.

"Oh like you should talk, *Daddy,* " I said punching him in the arm.

"You should both shut up, if anyone wants my opinion," Rosalie added casually with a shrug, following her husband into the dining room. Rose and Emmett had gotten married two years ago and Carrington had been born a year later. She was the first grandchild and was the princess of the family. She was the

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spitting image of her mother with almost silvery blond hair and soft delicate features. The only trace of Ryan in her was the eyes. She had the same green eyes that I myself had inherited from my father. Otherwise, she was entirely Hale.

Everyone sat down at the large table and dinner began. As usual, Carrington preferred to sit on my lap rather than in her chair and I tried to eat around her, doing my best to avoid her "help".

"Bennett, I've been meaning to ask you. Would you invite Chloe to dinner next week, and do your best to convince her to come?" I rolled my eyes before looking at my mom and received a kick in the shin from my father.

"Why is everyone so insistent on getting her over here?" I knew my voice was possibly a bit high and loud for the dinner table but I was so tired of having this conversation with my family.

"Bennett you know none of her family is here. She's in a strange city all alone, and-"

"Mom," I interrupted. "She's lived here since college. It's not a strange city to her anymore."

"Like I was saying," she answered a hint of warning in her voice. "She lives alone and she's such a pretty girl and I have someone I want to introduce her to." My fork froze in mid air as those words sunk in. She wanted to set her up with someone. Well this was odd. I felt something, constrict in my chest, but I wasn't sure what it was. If I had to put a name on it, I'd call it…anger?

Why would I be angry that my mom wanted to set Ms. Mills up? *Well probably because you're fucking her, dumb ass.* Well not really fucking her so much as fucked her…twice. "Fucking her" would constitute my intent to continue. Oh, and I molested her in an elevator and went down on her in my office. Wow, put that way it sounded *really* bad.

Clearing my throat, and trying to rid the venom from my voice, I responded. "Sure, mom. I'll talk to her. But don't get your hopes up. She's about as charm free as they come, and that's a hard deal to close." I shoved another bite into my mouth.

"You know, Ben," My brother decided to chime in, "I think everyone here would agree that *you* are the only one that she seems to be unpleasant to." I looked around the table, frowning at the heads nodding and agreeing with my idiot brother. Returning my glare to Emmett, I saw he wore a surprisingly smug look on his face. Great, now she was even fucking with me here too.

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The rest of the night consisted of *more* talk about how I needed to try and be nicer to Ms. Mills, and about how *great* they all thought she was, and about how much she would like my mom's best friend's son, Mike. *Yea right.*

We also talked about the meetings we had lined up for this week. A big one was planned for Thursday afternoon, and I would be accompanying my father and brother there. I knew that she already had everything all planned and ready to go. The one thing I could expect was that she was always two steps ahead of everything I needed. A thought that for some reason left me suddenly feeling warmer.

I left with the promise that I would do my best to convince her to come, although to be honest I didn't even know when I would see her again. I had meetings and appointments all over the city for the next few days, and even if I saw her for a brief moment as I ran in or out of the office, I had absolutely no desire to talk to her after today's little incident.

Thursday

Glaring at the traffic as we crawled down South Michigan Avenue, I wondered if my day would ever improve. I fucking hated sitting in traffic. The office was only a few blocks away, and I was seriously considering just having the driver take the car back and getting out and walking. Looking down at my watch, I saw that it was already after 6, and we'd managed to travel only 3 blocks in 20 minutes.

Perfect. Closing my eyes I rest my head back on the seat, and recounted the meeting I had just left.

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Nothing in particular had gone wrong; in fact it was quite the opposite. The clients had been thrilled with our proposals, and everything had gone off without a hitch. I just seemed to be in a fucking bad mood.

Emmett had made a point of telling me every fifteen minutes of the last three hours that I was behaving like a moody teenager, and by the time the contracts were signed, I wanted to pummel him.

Every chance he had he asked what the hell my problem was, and frankly, I couldn't say I blamed him. Even I had to admit I had been a fucking prick the last couple of days. And for me, that was saying something. Of course Emmett thought he had all the answers and decided my problem was that I needed to get laid. God, if he only knew.

It had been two days. Just two mother fucking days since that bitch walked out of my office leaving me rock hard and with a terminal set of blue balls, and I

was a total mess. The way I was acting you'd think I hadn't had sex in 6 months. But no, two-going on three-days of not touching her and I felt like a fucking lunatic. The car stopped again and I thought I would scream. Glancing out the tinted windows, I noticed where we had stopped; right in front of the La Perla lingerie boutique. I was out of the car before I could even register the thought.

Standing on the curb waiting to cross, it occurred to me that I didn't have a clue what I was doing.

What was the point of going in? What was I planning on doing? Was I buying something or just planning on torturing myself? As I reached the glass doors, I consoled myself with one thought; at least I'd have some new material for jacking off. God, this was so fucking sick.

I stepped into the stylish store and was immediately overwhelmed with a sense of familiarity. The floors were a warm honey wood, the ceilings littered with long cylindrical light fixtures, clustered into groups throughout the large room. The dim lighting cast the entire space in a soft intimate glow, illuminating the tables and racks of expensive lingerie. But the familiarity, if I was being honest, came from the lingerie itself. Something about the delicate lace and satin brought on that all too familiar desire for her.

Running my fingers along a table set near the front of the store, I became aware that I had already gathered the attention of the sales staff. A tall, beautiful, yet overly made up blonde walked towards me.

"Welcome to La Perla," she said brightly. "Is there something I can help you find today? Maybe a gift for your wife? Your girlfriend perhaps?" she added, a hint of flirtation in her voice.

"Um…No, thank you," I answered, suddenly feeling ridiculous for even being here. "I'm just looking." I glanced away quickly, but not before noticing the way her eyes appraised me up and down.

"Well if you change your mind let me know," she said with a wink, before turning and making her way back to the sales counter. I watched her walk away appreciatively and was immediately disgusted that I hadn't even considered getting her number. *Fuck*. I wasn't a total whore, but a beautiful woman in an underwear store of all places had just flirted with me and the thought hadn't even occurred to me to flirt back. *Holy shit.* What the hell was wrong with me?

Running my hands through my hair, I decided it was time to take stock of the situation. I needed to face the fact that I was completely out of control. One look around at my current location was proof enough of that. All I could think about

was having sex with this woman, and it was fucking pissing me off.

I was just about to turn and leave when something caught my eye. Walking over, I let my fingers run across the sexy black lace garter belt hanging on a rack. I hadn't realized that women really wore these outside of Playboy photo shoots until I'd started working with *her*. I remembered sitting next to her during a meeting our first month working together. She had crossed her legs and shifted in just the right way that her skirt rode up, revealing the delicate white strap attached to her stockings. I'd had to spend lunch beating off in my office.

"See anything you like?" I turned, startled to hear a familiar voice standing behind me. Shit. Ms. Mills.

But I'd never really seen her like this before. She looked stylish like always, but completely casual.

She was wearing what I'm sure were a very expensive pair of jeans, and a red tank top. Her hair was in a sexy ponytail, and without much makeup or her glasses, she didn't look much older than 20.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"What the fuck business of yours is it what I'm doing here?" I growled back.

"So, what? You don't have enough of *my* underwear that you have to start a collection of your own?" she glared at me, motioning to the garter belt still in my hands.

"Ms. Mills, I -"

"What exactly do you do with them anyway? Do you have them tucked away some where like little mementos of your conquests? Fucking pervert." Her arms folded across her chest, causing her breasts to push together and up from the red shirt. My eyes fell straight to her tits and I felt my self hardening.

"Holy shit," I said shaking my head. I almost laughed that we were once again at each other's throats.

"Why do you have to be such a fucking bitch all the time?" I all but shouted at her. I could feel myself literally shaking with rage. I had never met someone who had this effect on me.

"I guess you just bring out the best in me," She said angrily. She was leaning forward, her chest nearly touching mine. Looking around I noticed that we were gathering attention from the other people in the store

"Look," I said trying to compose myself. "How about you calm down and lower your voice some." I knew I had to get the fuck out of here soon, before

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

something happened again. For some sick reason, fighting with this woman always ended up with my cock hard and her panties in my pocket.

“Come with me,” she seethed, and grabbed hold of my arm, pulling me towards the back of the store.

My eyes instantly dropped to her ass as she walked in front of me, and I had to suppress a groan. She pulled me around a corner and through a door and I realized we were in a dressing room. She had obviously been here a while as there were hangers of different types of lingerie hanging on hooks from the walls and a pile of panties on a velvet chaise against the wall. Music was being piped through overhead speakers, and I was glad I wouldn’t have to worry about keeping my voice down too much as I strangled her.

Closing the large mirrored door opposite the chaise, she stood with her eyes closed, every muscle in her body seemed to be tense and on edge. “Did you follow me here?” she asked glaring at me angrily.

“What?” I almost shouted. “Why the fuck would I do that?”

“So you just *happened* to be browsing around a *women’s* lingerie store. Just some pervy thing you do in your spare time, *Mr. Ryan*?” she snapped venomously with an eyebrow crooked.

“God, you are such a fucking bitch,” I sneered at her. But even as I said the words, our bodies were moving closer and our breathing was picking up.

“You know, it’s a good thing you’ve got that big dick to make up for that fucking mouth of yours,” she fired back, her eyes running along my body before meeting my face again.

“Oh yea?” I said, moving closer to her, backing her up against the dressing room wall. “I didn’t hear you complaining about my mouth the other day in my office, *Ms. Mills*. Speaking of which, I believe it is now you, who owes me.”

Her chest was heaving, and I saw her eyes move to my mouth as she bit her bottom lip.

Slowly wrapping my tie around her fist, she pulled me to her, and I couldn’t hold back any more. My mouth opened as her soft tongue entered and met mine.

Groaning into her mouth, I slid one hand to her jaw and the other up to her hair, removing her ponytail. Soft waves fell around my hand and I fisted it tightly, jerking her head to better accommodate my mouth. She moaned and I pulled it tighter. “You like that?” my voice rumbled into her mouth. “You like it rough, don’t you?”

“God, yes,” she moaned seductively in response. At that moment, hearing those words, I didn’t care about anything else; where we were, who we were, or how we felt about each other. Never in my life had I felt such raw sexual chemistry with anyone. When we were together like this, nothing else mattered, I was overtaken by animalistic lust and she was the only thing that could tame it.

My hands ran down her sides and I gripped the hem of her shirt, bringing it up and over her head, breaking our kiss for only a second. Not to be left behind, she pushed my jacket from my shoulders, letting it drop to the floor.

My thumbs ran circles across her skin as I moved my hands to the waist of her jeans. Quickly undone, they fell to the floor, and she kicked them and her sandals off. Pulling away from her mouth, I began placing wet kisses on her neck and shoulders.

“Fuck,” I growled. Looking up I could see her perfect body reflected back at me in the full length mirror. She was wearing a sheer black pair of panties that only covered half her ass and a matching bra, her silky hair spilling down across her back. The muscles in her long, tone legs flexed as she stood up on her toes to reach my neck, and the visual along with the feeling of her lips were causing my dick to push painfully against the confines of my pants.

She bit my ear roughly as her hands went to the buttons of my shirt. Our breaths were quickly becoming pants as our movements became more frenzied. My own hands undid my pants and belt, pushing them and my boxers to the floor. Pulling her with me, I moved to the chaise.

A thrill shot through me as my hands moved around her ribs to the clasp of her bra. Her breasts pressed against me as if urging me on, and I kissed along her neck as my fingers quickly unhooked it and I pulled the straps from her shoulders. I pulled back slightly to allow the garment to fall, and for the first time, took in the full view of her tits completely bared to me. Fucking perfect. In my fantasies I’d done everything to them; touched them, kissed them, sucked them, fucked them, but nothing compared to the reality. My dick was throbbing now as I sat down on the chaise and buried my face between them. Her hands ran through my hair, pulling me closer, and I took one perfect pink nipple into my mouth, causing her to hiss and tug harder. *Fuck that felt good*. I guess she wasn’t the only one who liked things rough.

So many emotions were running through my mind. At this moment, there was nothing in this world I wanted more than to bury myself in her. But I knew that when it was over, I would hate us both. Her for making me weak, for teasing and tormenting me, for bringing me to my knees; and myself for losing control

again, for allowing my lust to override my anger. Despite all of this hatred, I knew I couldn't stop. I had turned into a junkie, living for my next fix. My perfectly constructed life was crashing around me and all I cared about was sinking into this demon in front of me.

Sliding my hands down her sides, I let my fingers run along the waist of her panties. A shiver went through her, and I closed my eyes tightly as I fisted the material in my hand; willing myself to stop.

"Fucking rip them, you know you want to," she hissed into my ear and then bit down hard. In one quick movement, her panties were nothing but a pile of ripped lace in the corner of the room.

Grabbing her hips roughly I lifted her, bringing her to straddle my lap and finally plunging inside of her.

The feeling was so intense that I had to forcefully still her hips to keep from exploding. "Fuck," I groaned, my jaw clenched; every thought focused on trying to make this last. If I lost it now, I knew she would throw it back in my face later. And I wouldn't give her the satisfaction.

Once I felt in control, I began moving her hips. We hadn't fucked in this position yet, and even though I hated to admit it, our bodies fit together perfectly. Bringing my hands down her hips to her legs, I gripped one in each hand and wrapped them around my hips. The change of position brought me deeper inside her, and I buried my face in her neck to keep from groaning out loud.

I was aware of the sounds of voices all around us as people entered and left the other dressing rooMs. The thought that we could get caught at any moment only made this better.

Her back arched with a stifled moan, and her head fell back. Her tits were now enticingly close to my face, and the almost innocent way she bit her lip was driving me crazy. Once again I found myself looking over her shoulder, watching us fuck in the mirror. I had never seen anything so erotic in my entire life.

She pulled my hair once again, pulling my mouth back to hers, our tongues gliding against each others, matching the motion of our hips. "Fuck. You feel so good," I whispered into her mouth. "Turn around; you need to see something." I pulled her off of me and turned her to face the mirror. With her back against my chest she settled on my lap again and I guided my dick back into her.

"Oh God," she breathed out heavily as her head fell back against my shoulder, and I was unsure if it was from the feeling of my dick inside her or the image

reflected in the mirror.

I gripped her hair and forced her head back up, “No, I want you to look right there,” I growled in her ear, meeting her gaze in the mirror. “I want you to watch me fuck you. And tomorrow when you’re sore, I want you to remember who did this to you.”

“Just shut up and fuck me,” she answered back, her hands running up her body and behind her until they dug into my hair.

“Oh, you want to play rough, little tease?” I taunted, grabbing her hips and pulling her harder onto me. “And you better keep that mouth of yours quiet. You don’t want all these people to know you’re getting fucked in here right next to them, do you?”

A quiet moan was her only response, and I found myself smirking at the fact that I had finally shut her up. Her body continued to bounce up and down on my dick, causing her perfect tits to bounce right along with them. My hands roamed every inch of her body and I rained wet kisses and bites along the backs of her shoulders. In the mirror I could see my dick sliding in and out of her; and as much as I didn’t want these memories in my head, I knew that was a sight I would never forget.

Feeling the walls of her pussy begin to tighten, I moved one hand down to her clit.

Our bodies were now covered in a thin sheen of sweat, leaving her hair sticking slightly to her forehead. Her gaze never left mine as our hips continued to gyrate against each other, and I knew we were both close. The voices around us continued, completely unaware as to what was going on in this tiny room. I knew from *past experience* that our little secret would not be kept for long when she came if I didn’t do something. So as her movements became more frenzied and her hands gripped my hair tighter I reached my hand up over her mouth to stifle her scream.

“Fuck!” I stifled my own moans against her shoulder and with a few more thrusts I felt myself explode deep inside her. Her body slumped against me as I leaned back against the wall, her body rising and falling with the force of my labored breathing.

I knew I needed to get up and dress, but I didn’t think my shaky legs could carry me. Any hope I had that the sex would become less intense, and that I would get over this obsession was quickly being crushed. Reason was slowly beginning to seep back into my consciousness, along with the disappointment

that I had once again allowed myself to succumb to this weakness.

Meeting her eyes in the mirror, I swore something passed between us. Did she feel the same way I did? Was this as big a mistake to her as it was to me? And what were we going to do about it? I lifted her off of me and quickly got redressed, trying not to meet her gaze again. The dressing room area suddenly seemed too quiet and small and I was overly aware of each breath she took.

Straightening my tie, I bent down to grab the torn panties on the floor, depositing them in my pocket.

I went to grab the door handle and stopped. Reaching out, I ran my hands slowly along the lacy fabric hanging from one of the hooks on the wall.

I met her eyes finally and said. “Get the garter belt too.” And without looking back, I walked out of the dressing room.

EBOOK ECXLUSIVE

FIVE - Overdrive

There were eighty-three vents, twenty-nine screws, five blades, four bulbs and a whole lot of dust on the ceiling fan above my bed. *Great.* I rolled onto my side, certain muscles mocking me and providing undeniable proof of why I was unable to sleep. Chills ran down my spine and my nipples hardened as I thought back to his words yesterday afternoon.

"*No, I want you to look right there. I want you to watch me fuck you. And tomorrow when you're sore, I want you to remember who did this to you."*

He really wasn't kidding . My hips and my thighs had never ached so beautifully as they had every time I moved tonight. Huffing a sigh and reaching under the blankets, I gave up and groaned in frustration as I pulled my soaking wet panties off, throwing them on the floor. This was getting old.

I'd never gone through so much underwear in my life…and that was without his help. With his help… well, that was an entirely different matter. My poor, poor panties. That man had destroyed almost $500 in lingerie. Good lingerie. My power panties.

Well, I guess we saw how far they got me.

The situation was so insane that I couldn't help but laugh in my silent room. I was fucked in a dressing room seven hours ago. And fucked *well*. With Mr. Ryan out of the office yesterday morning, I had finished my work and left early, hoping to escape the constant thoughts of him. What better way to distract myself than with some shopping? And even then, despite all my efforts to avoid him, there *he* was, browsing through lingerie at La Perla.

The man might be a complete bastard, but there was no denying he knew what he was doing. And despite the fact that I couldn't stand him, I was loving every minute of it. God, my body was such a traitor.

Without realizing it, my hand had traveled to my breast; absently twisting my nipple over my ribbed tank top. Closing my eyes, I let out a breath I didn't know I'd been holding as the touch of my own hands turned into those in my memory. His long graceful fingers ghosting along the underside of my breasts, his thumbs brushing my nipples, cupping me in his large hands… damn it. I let out a loud sigh and kicked a throw pillow off my bed. I knew exactly where this train of thought was headed. I had done this exact same thing three nights in a row and it had to fucking stop now. With a huff I rolled over onto my stomach, and closed

PROOF ECXL SLIP

my eyes tight, willing sleep to come.

But twenty minutes later, I was still awake. *Shit.*

How had my life come to this? I still remembered, with perfect clarity, the day almost a year and a half ago when Carlisle asked me up to his office for a talk. Although I was close with the Ryans, he had sounded very formal when he'd phoned my office where I was currently working as a Junior Assistant, and frankly I was scared shitless. Upon entering, his secretary smiled and ushered me right in.

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Sixteen months earlier

"Chloe." Carlisle greeted me with a warm smile and motioned to the large chair opposite him. "Please, have a seat. I have something I'd like to discuss with you."

"Of course, Mr. Ryan," I smiled back nervously, taking my seat.

"Chloe, I've called you in today because I have some big news to share, and an offer I'd like you to consider. I'm sure you're aware that my son Bennett has been living and working in Paris for the last six years. He's made quite a name for himself at Louis Vuitton, but I made him an offer to work here and I'm happy to say that he said yes. He'll be taking over as CFO, and I'd like it very much if you'd agree to be his executive assistant. You've been an outstanding part of this company for a while now, and I think that you and Bennett would make a great team. He's going to need your guidance with company policy and culture in the beginning, but I'm sure you'll settle into a smooth working relationship quickly. What do you say, Chloe?"

I sat there for a few moments, completely stunned. He wanted to promote me to executive assistant to the CFO. I replayed the words over and over in my mind, trying to convince myself that it wasn't a joke. This was beyond amazing. This would mean a new office, higher pay and… I almost gasped, more money to spend on La Perla.

"Chloe?" Carlisle asked, sounding concerned. I looked up, dazed, to see that he had walked around the desk and was now kneeling if front of me.

Shaking my head slightly to clear it I smiled. "I can't believe this is happening. I'm so honored that you would even consider me." Tears were welling in my eyes and I tried frantically to blink them away.

"Chloe," he said taking my hands and speaking softly. "Besides the fact that
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Esme and I adore you, there is no one I would trust more to work with my son. You do a fantastic job here and I've been so thrilled to watch your progression in this company and as a person over the last five years."

"Thank you. Thank you so much," I whispered back, trying to keep the tears at bay. "I just hope I can live up to your expectations." I had never met Bennett, but with a family like this, how could he be anything but wonderful?

"I'm absolutely certain you will." Carlisle stood and walked back around his desk to sit back down.

"I've told Bennett all about you, and he is very anxious to meet you."

"You and your family must be thrilled that he's coming home after all these years," I said, thankful for the change in subject. I was a bit overwhelmed and needed to distract myself.

"Oh, we are. He's been gone for so long," he said trailing off, a small smile gracing his lips. "You know, I always hoped that my sons would both work here, but Bennett…" he added shaking his head in good humor. "Bennett has always been his own man and a bit stubborn. He insisted he go out into the world and make a name for himself. He's extremely driven and quite independent, which is why I know that you two will be perfect together."

I gratefully accepted the position and left the office in a smiling haze. All my years of loyalty and hard work were finally paying off. Carlisle explained that I would move up to the eighteenth floor immediately and work along with the current CFO and assistant; they were both set to retire this year, so the transition would be a smooth one. I was relieved to know that I would have a full six months of training ahead before Bennett arrived. Carlisle also gave me an advanced copy of the memo that would be sent around the company telling of Bennett's background and arrival.

Wow. That was my only thought as I looked over the paper on my way back to my office. Senior Management Controller in Paris, youngest nominee ever featured in the Crain's "Forty under 40", published in the Wall Street Journal, and a dual MBA from NYU-Stern School of Business and HEC

Paris, where he specialized in Corporate Finance and Global Business, graduating summa cum laude.

All by the age of twenty-eight. *Christ.* What was it Carlisle had said? *Extremely driven*? That was an understatement if I'd ever heard one.

The six months seemed to fly by and I had to admit, I was made for my job. During that time, I tried to glean every bit of personal information about him I

could. I knew quite a bit about Bennett the professional, but very little of Bennett the person.

Emmett hinted that his brother didn't quite share his jovial personality, but when I had acted concerned he quickly put my mind at ease.

"He has a tendency to be a bit stiff and completely anal retentive at times, but don't worry about it, Chloe. Just give him some time to loosen up and you guys are going to be a great team. I mean, come on," he said, wrapping his large arm around me. "How could he not love you?"

I hated to admit it now, but by the time he was set to arrive, not only was I extremely anxious, but I had developed a bit of a crush on Bennett Ryan. Not only was he beautiful, but I was incredibly impressed with all the amazing things he had accomplished in his relatively short life. We had communicated through email leading up to his arrival and although he seemed nice enough, he was never overly friendly.

On the morning of the big day, Bennett wasn't set to arrive until after the board meeting that afternoon where he would be officially introduced, so I knew I had the entire day to work myself up into a ball of nerves. Being the good friend she is, Angela came upstairs to distract me. She sat in my chair and we spent over an hour discussing the merits of the *Clerks* movies .

Soon I was laughing so hard, I had tears running down my face. I didn't noticed that Angela stiffened when the outer office door opened, and I didn't notice that someone was now standing behind me.

And though Angela tried to warn me with a swift hand across the throat, the universal sign for "shut the fuck up", I ignored her, because apparently I'm an idiot.

"And then," I giggled, holding onto my sides, "She says, 'Fuck, I had to take a fucking order off a guy I blew after Junior Prom, once.' And then he says, 'Yeah, I've waited on your brother, too." Another bout of laughter hit me, and I stumbled backward a bit until I collided with something hard and warm.

With a gasp, I spun around and was mortified to see that I had just ground my ass onto my new boss's thigh. "Mr. Ryan, I'm so sorry!"

Bennett did not look amused.

In an attempt to ease the tension, Angela stood and extended her hand. "It's a pleasure to finally meet you. I'm Angela Weber, Emmett's assistant."

He simply glanced at her hand without returning the gesture and raised one of

his perfect eyebrows.

“Pardon me, Ms. Weber. Don’t you mean Mr. Ryan?”

Her hand slowly fell as she watched him, obviously flustered. Something about his physical presence was so intimidating, she was at a loss for words for a moment. When she recovered, she stuttered, “Well… we are fairly casual around the office here. We’re all on a first name basis. This is your assistant, Chloe.”

His eyes met mine sternly as he nodded. “Ms. Mills. You will refer to *me* as Mr. Ryan. And I expect you in my office in five minutes so that we may discuss proper workplace decorum.” His voice was serious when he spoke, and he nodded curtly to Angela. “Ms. Weber.”

His gaze held mine for another moment before he turned on his heel to stalk back to his office, and I watched in horror as the first of his infamous door slams took place.

“What. A. Bastard,” Angela mumbled between tight lips.

“Beautiful Bastard,” I replied, still in somewhat of a trance from his eyes.

I nervously made my way to his office door with a cup of coffee, made just the way he liked it per his email last week. My knock was followed by an abrupt ‘come in’, and I willed my hands to stop shaking long enough to enter the room. I curved my lips into a friendly smile, intent on making a better impression this time, and opened the door to hear him talking on the phone and writing furiously on the pad in front of him. My breath halted when I heard his smooth deep, voice speaking in flawless French.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

“Ce sera parfait. Merci, mon ami,” He ended the call, but never lifted his eyes from his papers to greet me. Once I was standing in front of his desk, he addressed me in the same stern tone as before. “In the future, Ms. Mills; you will keep all non-workplace related conversations outside of the office. We are paying you to work, not gossip. Do I make myself clear?”

I stood speechless for a moment until he lifted his emerald eyes to meet mine, cocking an eyebrow. I shook myself out of my trance, all at once realizing the truth about Bennett Ryan. Although he was even more breathtakingly gorgeous in person, he was not at all like I had imagined. And he was absolutely nothing like his parents and brother.

“Crystal… sir,” I stammered as I walked around his desk to set his coffee in front of him. But just as I was about to reach his desk, my heel caught on the rug and I lunged forward. I heard a loud *Shit!* escape his lips; the coffee now nothing more than a scorching stain on his expensive suit. “Oh my god, Mr. Ryan, I am

so sorry!”

I rushed over to the sink in his bathroom to grab a towel, and ran back, falling to my knees in front of him and attempting to lift the stain. In my hurry and ultimate humiliation that I didn’t *think* could get any worse; it suddenly occurred to me that I was furiously rubbing the towel against his crotch. I averted my eyes and hand, feeling the heated flush of my face spread all the way to my neck as I caught a glimpse of the noticeable bulge in the front of his pants.

“You may leave now, Ms. Mills,” he uttered in a tight tone, and I quickly nodded, rushing out of the office. That had most definitely not gone to plan. And I couldn’t believe I had made such a horrible first impression.

Thankfully I had proven myself pretty quickly after that. There were times when even he seemed impressed with me, although he always seemed to be short and on edge. I just chocked it up to his being a giant ass, but had always wondered if there was something specific about me that rubbed him the wrong way. Besides that towel, of course.

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EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

By the time I was done with my trip down memory lane hell, it was 5:45. *Wonderful, just in time to get up for work.* But even as I showered and let the warm water loosen my aching muscles, my thoughts were still stuck on why they were in this state.

This really needed to stop. Seriously this time.

When I arrived at work, I bumped into Angela on my way to the elevator. We made plans to have lunch next week and said goodbye as she reached her floor. Arriving at the eighteenth floor, I noticed that Mr. Ryan’s office door was closed as usual, so I was unsure if he was here yet. I turned on the computer, and tried to mentally prepare myself for the day. Why did it feel like every time I sat in this chair lately I was filled with a sense of anxiety? I knew I would see him this morning; we went over the schedule for the coming week every Friday. But I was unsure what kind of mood he would be in.

Though recently I noticed his temper tantrums had gotten even worse. *Childish little prick.*

His last words to me yesterday had been, ‘Get the garter belt too’. And I had. In fact, I was wearing it now. Why? I had no idea. What in the hell had he meant by that? Did he think he was going to get the chance to see it? No fucking way. Then why had I worn it? I swear to God if he rips it…I stopped myself before I could finish. That was the most fucked up thing I’d ever thought. Of course he
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wouldn't rip it. I was never going to give him the chance to rip it. *Keep telling yourself that Mills*.

Answering some emails and making a few hotel inquiries took my mind off the situation for a bit, and about an hour later his office door opened. Looking up, I was met with a very businesslike and calm Mr. Ryan. No trace remained of the reckless and animalistic man who had taken me in the La Perla dressing room fourteen hours ago.

"Ms. Mills? Are you ready to begin?" He asked coolly.

"Yes sir," I answered in a calm collected voice. Okay, so that's how this was going to play out. Fine by me. I didn't know what I'd been expecting, but was somewhat relieved that things weren't different.

Grabbing my Blackberry, calendar, and notebook; I walked into his office and took a seat opposite his desk. Immediately I began going over the list of tasks and appointments that needed his attention. He listened quietly, jotting things down or entering them into his computer when needed.

"There is a meeting with E.C. Publishing scheduled for 3:00 this afternoon. Your father and brother are also planning to attend. It will probably take up the rest of the afternoon, so the rest of today's calendar has been cleared." Eventually, we got to the part I had been dreading. "We also have the IABC Financial Communication Workshops coming up in Seattle next month," I said quickly; suddenly becoming interested in what I was writing in my calendar. The pause that followed seemed to drag forever, and I glanced up to see what was taking so long. He was staring at me, a pen in hand tapping on the desk and his face completely void of any expression.

PROOF FOR USE

"Is that something you will be accompanying me to?" he asked in a flat tone.

"Yes." The silence in the room was deafening. I had no idea what he was thinking, not a trace of emotion in his voice or mannerisMs. "Make all the necessary arrangements," he said with an air of finality as he resumed typing on his computer. *Prick.* Assuming I had been dismissed, I stood from my chair and began walking towards the door.

"Ms. Mills," I turned to look at him, and even though he didn't meet my gaze, he almost seemed nervous. Well, *that* was different. "My mother has asked me to extend an invitation to you for dinner next week."

"Well please tell her I'll look at my schedule," I said, turning to leave again.

"She's also asked that I encourage you to attend." I halted all movement.

Turning back slowly, I saw he was now staring at me, and he definitely looked uncomfortable. “And why exactly would she do that?”

“Well,” he said before clearing his throat. “Apparently she has someone she would like to introduce you to.” This was new. I’d known the Ryans for years, but although she might have mentioned a name in passing, she had never actively tried to fix me up with someone.

“Why would your mother be trying to set me up?” I asked walking back towards his desk and folding my arms over my chest.

“I have no idea,” he shrugged casually, but something in his face didn’t quite fit his nonchalant answer.

“Why don’t I believe you?” I questioned with a raised eyebrow. I was beyond curious now. He *never* looked uncomfortable. Something was going on. Suddenly, his brow furrowed in obvious annoyance.

“How the hell would I know? It’s not like we sit around discussing you,” he spat out venomously. If it wasn’t for the fact that they were obviously planning something, I might have actually found his reaction humorous. “Maybe she’s worried that with that sparkling personality of yours you’ll end up an old spinster with a house full of cats.” *Oh no he didn’t.*

Leaning forward with my palms on his desk I glared at him. “Well maybe she should be more worried that her son will turn into a dirty old man who spends his time hording panties and stalking girls in underwear stores.” Check and mate, asshole.

Jumping out of his chair, he leaned toward me, his face furious. “You know, you are the most-” He was cut off as the phone rang. We stared fiercely at each other from across the desk, both of us breathing heavily and for a moment I thought he would throw me down on it… and for another moment I wanted him to. *God I was disgusting.* Still glaring at me, he roughly reached for the phone.

“Yes,” he barked out sharply into the receiver, his eyes never leaving mine, and then he pressed the phone to his chest. “That is all, Ms. Mills.” Grabbing my things, I turned quickly and closed the door a bit harder than necessary behind me.

For the rest of the morning and early afternoon, Mr. Ryan stomped in and out of the office, slamming doors and being his usual charming self. By 2:00, I was inwardly weighing the risks of a personal injury suit if I was caught putting X-Lax in his precious non-fat-no-sugar peppermint mocha latte.

Looking at the time, I decided against it. I also noticed I had a text message

from Mr. Wonderful himself, informing me that he would meet me downstairs in the parking garage to head downtown.

Thank God the other executives and their assistants would be going. If I had to sit in a limo with that man alone for twenty minutes, there were only two possible outcomes. And only one of them left him with his balls intact.

The limo was waiting right outside, and as I made my way to it our driver smiled widely to me and opened the door. “Good afternoon, Ms. Mills. How are you on this beautiful spring afternoon?”

“I’m wonderful, Jeffrey. How’s school going?” I smiled back. Jeffrey was my favorite driver, and although he had a tendency to be a bit of a flirt, he always made me smile.

“Oh it’s going great. I’m having a bit of trouble in my physics class, but other than that it’s fine. Too bad you aren’t a scientist, maybe you could tutor me,” he said jokingly, wiggling his eyebrows.

“If you two are finished, we actually have somewhere important to be. Maybe you can flirt with Ms. Mills on your own time, Mr. Davis.” Mr. Ryan was apparently already inside waiting for me, and he glared at the two of us as he retreated back into the car . *Great.* I grinned and rolled my eyes at Jeffrey before stepping inside.

Aside from Mr. Ryan, the car was empty, and when I heard the engine start and we began pulling away I became worried. “Where are the others?” I asked confused.

“They had a dinner meeting after and will meet us there,” he responded while busying himself with his laptop. Looking down, I noticed that he was nervously tapping his foot. Okay, I could be wrong but something was definitely up.

Sitting on the seat opposite him, I eyed him suspiciously. He didn’t look any different. In fact, he looked sexier than hell. He was wearing a perfectly cut designer suit in a deep chocolate brown, an expensive dress shirt in the same color and a beautiful striped silk tie. His hair was its usual sexy mess and as he absentmindedly lifted his left hand up to his mouth and put his gold pen between his pouty lips. I actually had to shift in my seat a bit to ease a bit of discomfort that was building.

When he suddenly looked up, the smirk on his face let me know I had been caught ogling him. “See something you like, Ms. Mills?” he asked mockingly.

“Not really,” I replied back with a smirk of my own. And just because I knew it would get to him, I purposely recrossed my legs, making sure my skirt rode up

a bit more than was appropriate. The scowl was back in an instant. Mission accomplished.

The eighteen and a half minutes left of our twenty minute drive were spent trading dirty looks across the car while I tried to pretend I wasn't fantasizing about having his pretty head between my legs.

Needless to say, by the time we got there, I was in a bad mood. Neither of us said a word during the elevator ride upstairs, and the tension did not go unnoticed by either of us. God, I didn't think I'd ever felt so constantly worked up. I wondered briefly if this was what it was like to be a guy. If it was… well, damn.

The next three hours passed at a snail's pace. The other Ryans arrived and introductions were made all around. A particularly striking woman named Moira seemed to take an immediate interest in Mr. Ryan. She was in her early thirties with a short dark bob, luminous dark eyes, and a body to die for.

And of course the panty dropping smile was in full force today as he nearly charmed her unconscious.

Everyone convened in a large board room to begin the meeting, and I really tried to pay attention; but memories of another conference table kept entering my mind. At one point, Mr. Ryan stood at the head of the table going over some numbers on a spreadsheet, and made a point to ask me a question when I obviously wasn't paying attention. I swear I could have killed him right there. The look on his face let me know he knew exactly what I was thinking. He was pure evil. Part of me wanted to ask Esme if there were satanic drawings on the wall and people chanting in the room when he was born. I spent the rest of the meeting shooting mental daggers at his balls and groaning internally as I realized we still had the twenty minute car ride to look forward to.

When we walked back into the office at the end of the day, after an even more tense drive back, it still seemed like Mr. Ryan had something to say. And if he didn't do it soon, I was going to explode. I swear to God, when I wanted him to be quiet he couldn't keep his shit mouth shut. But when I needed him to say something, he became a mute. A sense of déjà vu and dread filled me as we made our way through the semi-deserted building and toward the elevator. The second those gold doors closed I wished I were anywhere but standing next to him. *Did it feel like there was suddenly less oxygen in here?* Glancing at his reflection in the polished brass doors, it was hard to tell how he felt. Other than the constant clenching of his jaw and his downcast eyes, he looked completely cool. *Bastard*.

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Reaching the eighteenth floor, I let out a deep breath I hadn't realized I was holding. That had to have been the longest forty-two seconds of my life. I followed him through the door, trying to keep my eyes off of him as he quickly entered his own office. But to my surprise, he didn't close the door behind him. He *always* closed his door. I made quick work of checking for messages and wrapping up a few last minute details before I could leave for the weekend. I don't think I'd ever been in more of a hurry to get out of here. Well, that wasn't exactly true. The last time we were alone on this floor I had made a pretty quick getaway. Shit, if there was ever a time to *not* think about that, it would be now, in the empty office. Just me and him.

He left his office right as I was gathering my things, placing an ivory envelope on my desk and continuing to the door without pausing. *What the hell was this?* Quickly opening the envelope I saw my name on several pieces of elegant ivory paper. It was paperwork for a private credit account at La Perla, with Mr. Bennett Ryan as the account holder. *Holy shit*. He opened me a credit account?

"What the fuck is this?" I seethed, jumping from my chair and turning to face him. "You opened me a line of credit?" I was absolutely livid. *How dare he?*

Stopping midstride and hesitating slightly, he turned to face me. "I made a phone call today, and arranged for you to purchase whatever you… need. There's no limit on the account," he stated flatly, having wiped all trace of discomfort from his face. This is why he was such a master at what he did.

He had an uncanny ability to regain control of any situation. But did he honestly think he could control *me*?

"So you arranged," I said, shaking my head and trying to keep some semblance of calm, "to buy me underwear."

"Well, just to replace the things that I…" he stopped, possibly rethinking his response. "The things that have been damaged. If you don't want it, *don't fucking use it,*" he said angrily turning to leave again.

"You fucking son of a bitch." I moved to stand in front of him, the crisp stationary now a mangled ball of paper in my clenched fist. "Do you think this is funny? Do you think I'm some plaything you can just dress up for your amusement?" I didn't know who I was angrier with: him for thinking of me that way, or me for allowing this *thing* to start in the first place.

He scoffed, "Oh yes, Ms. Mills. I find this absolutely hilarious."

I knew this was headed somewhere dangerous and had to get the hell out of there before I did something I would regret. "Take this and shove it up your ass."

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I shoved the papers into his chest and grabbed my purse. Glaring at him fiercely, I sneered, “I am not your whore, Mr. Ryan.” Pushing him aside, I literally sprinted to the elevator. *Fucking egotistical womanizing ass.* Logically I knew that he hadn’t meant to insult me; at least I hoped not. But *this*? This was exactly why you don’t fuck your boss. God, I guess I missed that during orientation.

“Ms. Mills!” he shouted, but I ignored him and stepped into the lift. *Come on*, I said to myself as I repeatedly pushed the button for the parking garage. His face appeared just as the doors closed and I smiled to myself as I flipped him off. *Real mature, Chloe.*

“Shit. Shit. Shit!” I yelled into the empty elevator, practically stomping my feet. That was it. No more. He might be hotter than hell and have a dick that makes my body sing, but I was out of this fucking sick situation. That bastard had ripped his last pair of panties.

The elevator chimed, signaling that I’d reached the garage, muttering to myself I made my way to my car. The garage was dimly lit and I was one of the only cars left on this level, but I was too furious to even give it a second thought. I’d hate to see the unlucky prick who dared mess with me right now.

Just as that thought entered my mind, I heard the stairwell door burst open and Mr. Ryan call out from behind me. *Just perfect*.

“Holy shit! Will you fucking wait?” he shouted. It did not escape my attention that he was out of breath. I guess sprinting down eighteen flights of stairs would do that to a person.

Unlocking my car, I jerked open the door, throwing my purse onto the passenger seat. “What the fuck do you want, Ryan?”

“Will you just give me a minute? God, can you take it out of bitch mode for two shit seconds and listen to me?” he panted.

I spun around to face him. “Do you think I’m some kind of fucking toy?” A million different emotions flashed across his face; anger, shock, confusion, hate; and fuck me if he didn’t look delicious. His tie was loosened, his hair a fucking mess and the bead of sweat running down the side of his jaw was not helping the situation. I was pissed dammit! Why is it that even with everything going on, I couldn’t stop picturing him bending me over his desk?

Keeping a careful distance with one hand pushed into his hair he smirked and shook his head. “Shit,” he hissed, looking around the garage. “You think you’re my toy? Fuck, it was just in case…” He stopped, trying to organize his thoughts.

“What? You think it’s actually going to happen again?” I said, unable to hide

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the disgust from my voice.

“God no!” he shouted, the sound echoing off the cement walls. “Maybe I’m just sick of you being such a cocktease and then handing me receipts,” he added, glaring at me and waiting for some kind of response. The rage was coursing through me so strongly that before I could stop myself, I stepped forward and slapped him hard across the face. With a shocked and furious glare, he reached up and touched the spot where I had struck him.

“Well you don’t have to worry about that anymore. You aren’t getting anywhere near my panties.

Ever. Again. ” It was sick, but even as I said the words, I could feel my nipples hardening.

The silence stretched before us; the sounds of the traffic and the outside world barely registering in my consciousness. “You know,” he began with a dark stare, taking a single step towards me. “I’ve said it before but…I didn’t hear you complaining.”

Oh that smooth fucker. “In that dressing room.” Another step. “When you watched me fuck you.” And another. “I didn’t hear one thing out of that fucking mouth of yours to convince me you didn’t enjoy every minute.”

My chest was heaving, and I could feel the cool metal of my car through the thin material of my dress.

Even with my shoes, he still stood a full head above me, and with his head bent, I could feel his warm, moist breath against my hair. All I had to do was look up, and our mouths would meet. “Well, it’s not happening again,” I hissed through clenched teeth, but each labored breath brought my aching nipples a brief moment of pleasure as they grazed his chest.

“No. Of course not,” he answered back, shaking his head softly and moving even closer to me, his hard erection now brushing my stomach. Putting a hand on either side of me, he pressed his hard lean body closer to me, and I had to stifle a groan.

“Maybe,” I growled, unsure if I meant to say it aloud or not.

“Just one,” he said, his mouth moving achingly closer to mine.

Turning my face up, I sneered into his open mouth. “I fucking hate you.”

“I hate this too.” Our mouths hovered tauntingly close to each other, our lips barely brushing, each sharing the other’s breath. I watched his nostrils flare slightly and just when I thought I would go insane, he took my lower lip roughly

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between his and pulled me sharply to him. Growling into my mouth, he deepened the kiss and pushed me forcefully against the car. Like last time, he reached up and removed the pins from my hair, letting it fall around us.

Our kisses were teasing and rough; coming together and pulling apart, hands fisting in hair and tongues sliding against each other. I gasped as he bent his knees slightly, bringing his hard cock roughly against me. “God,” I moaned in a raspy breath, wrapping my leg around him, the heel of my shoe digging into his leg.

“Fuck, I know,” he breathed heavily into my mouth. Looking down at my leg and cupping my ass with his hand, he gave it a rough squeeze and teased, “Have I told you how fucking hot those shoes are?

Such a naughty little girl, with a little bow on her fuck me shoes? Such a little tease.” I instantly felt another wave of arousal flood through me, and my panties became even wetter. I should slap him again for saying things like that to me; but when he said it in that deep whispered voice, it only made me want him more.

“Oh yea, asshole? Well there’s another bow somewhere else but you’ll need some luck finding it,” I snarled back, my mouth against his ear.

He pulled away, his lust filled eyes meeting mine. “Get in the fucking car,” his voice rumbled deep in his throat as he pulled the door open roughly.

I stood glaring at him, willing rational thought to penetrate my clouded brain. What should I do?

What did I want? Could I just let him have my body like this again? *Fuck*. I was so overpowered with the emotions coursing through me that I was trembling. Rational thought was quickly abandoning me as I felt his hand run up my neck and into my hair. Gripping it tightly he jerked my head towards him and stared into my eyes. “Now.” I knew in that moment, I was fighting a losing battle. As much as I tried to deny it, my body was his.

The decision was made, and once again I wrapped his silk tie around my wrist, pulling him into the backseat. Once the door closed behind him, he wasted no time tearing off his jacket and going straight for the ties on the front of my dress. I groaned as I felt him part the material and run his hands across my bare skin. Pushing me back to lie on the cool leather and kneeling between my legs, he placed his palm between my breasts, slowly moving down my abdomen to the white lace garter belt. His fingers ran down the delicate ribbons to the edge of my stockings and back up again, moving to run across the edge of my panties. The muscles of my abdomen clenched with every movement and I tried to

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control my breathing. Fingering the tiny white bows he looked up at me, “Luck has nothing to do with it.” *Fuck. Me.*

I pulled him to me by his shirt and slid my tongue into his mouth, groaning as his palm pressed against my aching pussy, causing the lace to rub across my clit. Our lips searched; our kisses long and deep, gaining urgency with every inch of skin uncovered. My hands pulled his shirt from his pants and explored his muscular arms, and carved chest, leaving a trail of goose bumps in my wake. I needed him undressed, my only thought being that I wanted him naked and above me.

Wanting to tease him the way he was teasing me, I ran my nails down his abdomen, across his belt and to the rock hard bulge now straining against his pants.

“Oh, fuck,” he groaned into my mouth. “You don’t know what you’re doing to me.”

“Tell me,” I whispered back. “Tell me and I’ll give you what you want.” I was using his own words against him, and just knowing the tables were somehow turned for the moment spurred me on. “Tell me what you want, you little tease.”

“Fuck!” he moaned and bit his lip, his forehead pressed against mine as he shuttered. “I want you to fuck me,” he growled out. Then pulling back to look at me, pure loathing twisting his features, he added, “And I fucking hate you for it.” His hands were shaking as he gripped my new panties in his fist; and as insane as it was, I wanted him to rip them. The raw passion between us was unlike anything I’d ever experienced, and if this was the last time I would feel this, I didn’t want him holding back. Without another word, he tore them from me, the pain of the fabric pulling across my skin only adding to the pleasure.

“You want me to fuck you huh?” I sneered, pulling my leg forward and pushing him back and off me.

Sitting up I shoved him against the seat back and straddled his lap. Gripping his shirt in my hands, I pulled it open roughly, sending the buttons scattering along the seat.

“You fucking bitch,” he spit out at me. I quickly pulled my dress off my shoulders and cut him off by crashing my mouth onto his. His hands gripped me roughly pulling my hips against him.

My senses were overwhelmed, and I knew I couldn’t last much longer. I wanted him inside me so badly, I was throbbing for it. I was lost to everything but him and this. The feel of the air against my skin, the ragged sounds of our

breathing, the heat of his kiss, and the thought of what was ahead.

With frantic hands I undid his belt and pants, and with his help managed to get them down his legs.

Settling over him he brushed against me; the tip of his cock grazing my entrance. I pulled his hair forcing his eyes to meet mine and slid onto him.

“Oh, God!” I groaned, the sensation of him within my body only causing the ache to intensify. Lifting my hips, I began to ride him, each movement feeling more intense than the one before. The pain from his rough fingertips on my hips only fueled my lust. His eyes were closed and his moans were muffled against my breast. Moving his lips across my lace bra he pulled one cup down, and took my hardened nipple between his teeth. I gripped his hair tightly and elicited a moan from him, his mouth opening and taking my aching breast inside

With each thrust I lost more of my resolve. My body was so in tune with him; it reacted to his every look and touch and sound. I both hated and loved how he made me feel. I’d never been one to lose control, but the responses he elicited from my body could no longer be denied.

“Do you like it?” I taunted. “How do you like being fucked with, little tease?”

He gripped my hips tighter halting my movements and stared up at me. “You just don’t know when to shut that pretty little mouth of yours, do you?” he snarled with a glare. And as I raised my hand to smack him again, he caught me by the wrist and shook his head. “You want to see being fucked with?”

Before I could answer he lifted me off and roughly threw me down onto the seat. Pushing my legs apart he plunged into me. I moaned loudly as he began driving into me. My car was too small for this, but there was nothing that could have stopped us now. Even with his legs bent awkwardly below him and with my arms braced above me to protect my head from the door, the pleasure was overwhelming.

Pulling himself onto his knees, and into a more comfortable position, he picked up one of my legs and placed it over his shoulder, forcing his cock deeper inside me. “Oh God, yes,” I panted.

“Yes?” he groaned out, lifting my other leg to rest across his other shoulder. Reaching out he gripped the door frame and used it for leverage to deepen his thrusts. “Is that how you like it?” The change in angle caused me to gasp, as the most delicious sensations spread throughout my body.

With my hands pushing off the door, I lifted my hips off the seat to meet each motion of his hips. “Oh fuck, yes. Harder,” I moaned loudly.

“Fuck,” he murmured as he turned his head slightly; his open mouth leaving wet kisses up and down my leg. By now our bodies were glistening with sweat, the windows were completely fogged up and our groans filled the silent space of the car. The dim glow from the garage lights emphasized every carved indentation and muscle of the masterpiece above me. I watched him in awe; his body was straining with the effort, his hair mussed and sticking to his damp forehead, the tendons in his neck pulled tight, and he was the most beautiful thing I’d ever seen.

Ducking his head between his outstretched arms, he met my eyes for a brief moment. Our gazes locked and our breaths were coming out in gasps; we were both close. Closing his eyes tightly he shook his head. “Oh God,” he panted. “Fuck… I can’t stop.”

“Me either,” I gasped, mirroring his look of desperation. Lifting my head up off the seat, I placed a hand on each side of his face and pulled his lips to mine in a searing kiss. Every nerve in my body was begging for release and each rough plunge of his rigid cock inside me pushed me closer to the edge.

For one brief moment I allowed myself to imagine what it would be like to have his body whenever I wanted, having him in my bed fucking me with wild abandon. The thought alone was enough to send an explosion ricocheting through me and I gripped his hair tightly.

“Aaghh…Fuck!” I screamed, my back arching off the seat and my pussy clenching hard around him.

“God…Fuck!…Fuck!” His voice was deep and raspy and with one last powerful thrust he tensed above me, his dick pulsing as he came. Exhausted and shaking, he removed my legs from his shoulders, gently placing them on the seat beside his hips and collapsing with his face against my neck. I couldn’t resist the urge to run my trembling hands through his damp hair one last time as we lay there panting, his heart racing against my chest. A million thoughts raced through my mind as the minutes passed. Slowly our breathing calmed and I almost thought he had fallen asleep when he moved his head away.

My sweaty body was instantly chilled as he pulled away from me and started getting dressed. I watched him for a moment before sitting up and putting on my dress. This was the most passionate thing I’d ever experienced. The sex between us was more intense than I knew possible. I felt completely drawn to him physically, but that was it. How could I want someone so much sexually and want nothing to do with them in any other way?

“This can’t happen again.” He said, startling me from my own thoughts. I

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turned to look at him; he was shrugging on his torn shirt, his eyes fixed straight ahead, his jaw clenched tight. Moments passed before he turned to look at me. “Do we understand each other, Ms. Mills?” I knew what I had to do.

“Tell Esme I’ll be there, *Mr. Ryan*. And get the hell out of my car.”

EBOOK ECXLUSIVE

SIX – The Evolution of Caveward

The burning in my chest was almost enough to distract me from the torment inside my head. *Almost.*

Reaching out, I increased the incline on the treadmill and pushed myself harder. It always worked.

That was how I lived my life. There was nothing I couldn't accomplish if I just pushed hard enough; school, career, family, women. Shit . *Woman.* Disgusted, I shook my head and turned up the volume on my iPod strapped around my bicep, hoping it would distract my mind long enough to get some fucking peace.

I should have known it wouldn't work. No matter how hard I tried, it was always there. I closed my eyes and it all came back; hovering over her, feeling her wrapped around me, sweaty, aching, wanting to stop but not being able to. Being inside of her was the most perfect torture. It satiated the hunger I felt at that moment, but like a junkie I found myself consumed by the need for more as soon as it ended. I'd been with a lot of women in my life, but had never experienced anything this all-consuming. In those moments with her, I'd do anything she asked. She brought me to my knees and made me weak. And that's why it had to stop; why I had to say the words out loud. So it was clear to both of us that it couldn't happen again. We'd never really talked about this thing that was happening, and I thought that was for the best. Because once it was said, it was real. And I knew that if I could just control myself long enough and wean myself from this addiction; I'd get it out of my system. I had to. There was no other option.

I felt the earbud being tugged from my ear along with the sudden disruption of my blaring music. I tried to keep pace with the treadmill, but had to slow it down so I wouldn't fall. I turned my head towards the source of my annoyance on the next machine. "Emmett, what?!"

"You keep that up, we're gonna be peeling you off the floor and investing in hearing aids for you before you're even thirty, bro," he replied, shaking his head. "What'd Chloe do to piss you off this time?"

I watched him roll his eyes as he spoke and I felt my stomach tighten at the sound of her name. I focused my attention back on the treadmill and increased the speed again. "What makes you think this has anything to do with Ms. Mills?"

“Um, maybe because your nostrils just flared twice as much as usual when you said that,” Emmett pointed out and I looked over to see that annoying ‘know-it-all’ grin on his face.

“For your information, smart ass, there is absolutely nothing bothering me. And even if there was, it would have nothing to do with my assistant,” I said nonchalantly, trying to return my focus to my workout.

“You are so full of shit,” he laughed heartily, shaking his head. “I’ve never met anyone who gets this kind of reaction out of you. And you know why, don’t you?” He had shut off his machine and was now focusing all his attention on me. I’d be lying if I said it wasn’t a little unnerving. My brother was perceptive; too perceptive at times. And if there was ever anything I wanted to keep from him, it was this.

I kept my gaze forward as I ran, trying not to meet his eyes. “No, but something tells me you’re going to fill me in.”

“Because you two are too much alike,” he said smugly. *Was he fucking insane?*

“What!?” Several people turned to see why I was yelling at my brother in the middle of the crowded gym. I stopped the machine and turned to face him. “How could you even think that? Ms. Mills and I are *nothing* alike.” I was sweaty, out of breath, and exhausted from running six miles; but right now, the rise in my blood pressure had nothing to do with my workout.

Taking a long drink from his water bottle, Emmett continued to smirk. “Who do you think you’re talking to, big brother? I’ve never met two people more alike. First of all,” he paused, clearing his throat and bringing his hand up to dramatically tick things off on his fingers. “You’re both intelligent, determined, hard working, loyal, and have the biggest hearts I’ve ever seen. *And*,” he continued, pointing a finger at me. “She’s the first woman in your entire life that stands up to you and doesn’t follow you around like some lost puppy dog.”

Had everyone lost their minds? Sure she might be some of those things; even I couldn’t deny that she was incredibly intelligent. And she was a hard worker; I was often surprised at how well she kept up with things. She was definitely determined, although I would describe it more along the lines of pig headed or stubborn. And there was no question of her loyalty. She could have sold me out a hundred times since we’d started this sick game. But big hearted? I guess I really didn’t know anything about that.

I stood, glaring at him as I tried to formulate my response. “Yeah, well she’s

also a raving bitch."

Stepping down, I quickly wiped off my machine and made my way across the gym in an effort to escape.

"Pffft," he scoffed behind me and laughed. "Keep telling yourself that."

Lying on my back, I began counting off sit ups; almost groaning when Emmett chose to lie on the mat next to mine. I was up to 154 and contemplating putting my headphones back in when he decided to speak, "Honestly man, do you not see the truth in any of this?"

I stopped, letting out an exacerbated sigh, and looked at him. "Look, it's not that-," I paused not even knowing what I wanted to say. "I'll admit that Ms. Mills has her strong points. But beyond that, I don't have much to add. It's no secret that we don't get along personally and I really don't see the need to keep having this discussion. If it's not you, it's mom or dad. It doesn't interfere with our working relationship, so topic closed."

He was quiet for a few moments before speaking again. "All I'm saying is that I think you two are more alike than you think. And maybe if you try to respect her for that, it will make things easier. Dad wouldn't have offered her the job if he didn't think you two would make a great team." Ignoring him, I continued with my sit ups. I was done talking about this.

Five minutes later, he sat up. "Well, I think I'm heading home. You still coming over for lunch today?" he asked, gathering his things as he rose.

"Yeah, I'll be here for at least another hour, so let my girl know I'll be there in time for tea," I chuckled; Carrington had gotten a tea set for her first birthday and we had a running date for tea parties, which consisted mainly of her banging the plastic tea pot on the table or letting her feed me all of the cookies.

"I will," he laughed, turning to leave before remembering something. "Rose wanted me to see if you managed to convince Chloe to make it to dinner Saturday?"

Suddenly becoming interested in how my shoelaces were tied, I answered, "Yea, she said she'd be there." I purposefully didn't meet his gaze hoping he would quit and leave. Unfortunately, I'm not that lucky.

"Am I the only one here who thinks it's hilarious that mom wants to set her up with Mike Newton?"

There went that feeling in my chest again. What the fuck was that about? Emmett and I had gone to high school with Mike, and he was a pretty decent

guy; but something about the thought of the two of them together made me feel like I wanted to punch something. “I mean, Mike is great, but Chloe’s a bit out of his league. Don’t you think? He’ll be the luckiest son of a bitch alive if he can pull that off,” he chuckled turning to leave again. “Later, bro!” he yelled over his shoulder.

“Yeah, later,” I mumbled. Suddenly feeling the need to expend a bit more energy, I moved to the punching bags to relieve some stress.

An hour and a half later, I pulled into the garage of my condominium. Shutting off the engine I leaned my head back against the seat and closed my eyes. I was exhausted. It didn’t escape my notice that in trying to keep the memories of last night out of my mind, I had nearly driven my body into the ground.

Without thinking, my eyes opened and inadvertently wandered to my glove box. Just the thought of what was tucked away in there caused my jaw to clench and my dick to harden slightly. *Fuck.*

Disgusted with myself for even considering opening the damn thing, I grabbed my gym bag and moved to open the door. I froze with my hand on the handle. It’s like they were calling to me. With a resigned sigh, I turned, flipped the latch and reached in, removing the white lace and shoving it into my bag. “I am so screwed,” I mumbled to myself, climbing out and slamming the door behind me.

“Good morning, Mr. Ryan,” The doorman greeted me, and I did my best to remove the grimace from my face and smile. Judging from the concerned look he gave me, I don’t think I was successful. I lived on the 87th floor in one of the most luxurious and prestigious complexes in all of Chicago, and as I walked in the door, I felt my nerves calm a bit.

Walking into the kitchen I grabbed a bottle of water out of the fridge and headed into my room. My favorite part about living here was the floor to ceiling windows that graced every exterior wall. My room was no exception, and the view it afforded was spectacular; especially at night. Although, I had to admit that the thoughts those windows evoked over the last two weeks had changed dramatically.

Fucking windows were giving me hard-ons now. Shit. Sighing, I threw my bag onto the bed and stripped off my shirt as I headed into the bathroom.

Letting the shower warm up, I began going through my gym bag, taking the dirty clothes out. My hands stopped when they touched the smooth lace. I knew I didn’t want to do this. Not here. My home was the one place she hadn’t invaded.

Well, that wasn't entirely true. I mean, I had jerked off to thoughts of her more times here than anywhere else; but nothing of hers had actually been here.

Sitting down on my bed, I pulled the scrap of material from the bag and held it in my hands. *La Perla*.

Of course.

Fingering the tiny white bows, I was instantly taken back to last night. I hadn't meant to make her upset with the credit account. To be honest, I didn't really know what my intent was. Was it to replace the things I'd ruined or to provide new ones? Fuck. If I didn't understand it, how the hell could I expect her to? Before I had even known what I was doing I had made a quick phone call and set it up. I'd been a mess all day going back and forth over whether this was a good idea. I'd almost handed it to her twice; the first time when we'd been going over the schedule and the second in the limo. And each time I'd been distracted or chickened out.

Finally as I walked out, I'd gotten the balls to just do it, and tossed the papers on her desk as I passed.

What I wasn't prepared for was her reaction. And when she'd gotten offended, I didn't know how to respond. I was bombarded with so many different emotions; anger that she thought this was all a game to me, shocked that she would have so little respect for my character, hurt that she was upset, and lust at her anger. Fighting with this woman turned me on more than anything. That was something I was surely going to need to seek therapy for one day.

When she'd shoved the papers back at me and walked out, I knew the smart thing would be to just let her go, but I couldn't. I ran down eighteen shit flights of stairs to find her; and even then she surprised the hell out of me. I tried to explain myself, but she wouldn't even shut up long enough for me to get a word in.

And then she fucking hit me. I'd never had a woman hit me before. I'd deserved it plenty of times, but no one had ever had the guts to do it. I didn't know whether to hate her, respect her, or just fuck the hell out of her. And before I knew it our mouths were inches apart. I could taste her breath and I wanted more than anything to close the gap and feel her lips on mine. For all she'd done tonight, I still wanted her, and my body moved closer to her as if by gravitational force. She whispered 'maybe' so quietly I didn't know if it was meant for her or me. That little word struck me so hard my chest that ached. I wanted it so badly. I wanted her one more time.

EBOOK-EXCLUSIVE

She said she hated me. I knew she hated me; hated the way we were together. I hated it too. But even as much as we despised each other, there was no denying the perfect way our bodies melded together. I'd never been with a woman who made me feel as if I was with my equal. But she matched me with every word, every kiss, and every touch. And I just needed to feel that way one more time; to be with someone I didn't hold back with. She teased me and tortured me and I knew I would still come back on my knees for more. And that is what I hated the most.

As anger and resentment rushed through me, I kissed her and roughly pressed against her body. It felt so fucking good to feel her and my cock was so hard it was throbbing. When she pulled me into the car, my senses were overwhelmed. Everything about her was so concentrated in the small space and I franticly began undressing her. I nearly came the moment I saw the garter belt. It was the same one I looked at in the store; white with little bows. Did she wear it on purpose? Did she hope that I would see it? My mind couldn't comprehend that maybe she was thinking of me as much as I was thinking about her.

My walls were dangerously close to slipping. "You don't know what you're doing to me," I had said.

And she toyed with me; making me tell her. What did she want to hear? That I jacked off almost every day to fantasies about her? That even though I resisted, the images of my cock moving in and out of her filled my dreams at night? So I told her. I wanted her to fuck me, and that I hated her for it. No words I'd ever said had been more true.

Once again she met my challenge. Pushing me off her, she straddled my hips and tore open my shirt.

I'd never been so turned on in my life as I was in that moment. I heard the buttons scatter along the leather seats and my only thought was that I needed to be inside her. And fuck, every time I felt her it was better than the last. Her hips rocked back and forth, taking me deeper, making me pant and groan into her breasts.

Time lost all meaning when I threw her onto the seat, intending to teach her a lesson. I needed more and I placed her legs on my shoulders, driving myself deeper inside. But somewhere inside that quiet dark space, alone with only the sounds of our pleasure, something changed. The anger was replaced by… desperation? Desperation because I was losing myself to her. Desperation because this would be over soon and I'd never see this beautiful woman beneath me again. And I didn't want that, because as much as I hated what she made me

feel, I wanted it again and again. I wanted it every day and every night. I wanted to see her hair across my pillows and to hear her scream my name. “Oh God,” I panted. “Fuck… I can’t stop.” One more wall came down. When we were together this way, my mask was gone. And just as I started to panic she saved me.

“Me either.” Never before had I been so soothed by two simple words. She felt it too. We didn’t have to explain; we understood. In this way, we were the same. Two selfish people taking from the other, and for a moment I wondered if it could continue. Was there a way to be like this, to have each others bodies and nothing more? She began to tighten around me, arching her back and bringing her gorgeous tits near my face. I tried to hold on, to make this last but her orgasm spurred my own and soon I was grunting and thrusting and cumming deep inside her.

Completely exhausted, I removed her legs and collapsed onto her. I wanted to be careful, but I couldn’t find the strength. This was so different, lying together like this. She ran her fingers through my hair and my eyes closed. My mind was telling me it was time to go; to put the walls back up, but my body begged me to stay. The air was cool against my damp skin, her heaving breath pushed her breasts into my chest and I tried to make the moment last as long as possible. Eventually, as reality came back into focus, my brain won out and I pulled away from her. Even though the situation was far from funny, I almost smiled as I pulled my torn shirt on. Was it really only two weeks ago that she had run from me wearing a similarly ripped shirt? Once again she had turned the tables.

BLACK EXCLUSIVE

Clenching my jaw tightly, it all came back. This just couldn’t continue. I was her boss, she was my employee. I’d already broken about a hundred corporate rules not to mention moral ones. And as much as the idea of using each other for sex appealed to me, it would never work. Even though we didn’t consider each other friends, or even like each other for that matter; I could never put her in that kind of position. We had already put ourselves in a dangerous situation; if anyone saw us…well, I couldn’t even think of that. And I knew for a fact that I didn’t want what being with her would mean. I didn’t want any type of actual relationship with her.

“This can’t happen again.” I said, not even looking at her. And then because I knew I had to make her hate me more, I glanced over to her and added. “Do we understand each other, Ms. Mills?”

The look on her face was that of confusion. Even I could see how she would be confused. My words and actions hadn’t exactly gone hand in hand. But then

her expression changed, and I knew I was in trouble. Good. “Tell Esme I’ll be there, *Mr. Ryan*. And get the hell out of my car.”

Shit. I knew it. Suddenly I didn’t want to leave. I knew what her agreeing to go meant. She wanted to meet Mike. *Fuck*.

I was brought back to reality by my cell phone ringing. Jumping slightly, I searched through my bag to find it. My mother. Not right now, I would call her later. Looking down at my lap, I realized another problem; I was hard as a rock. This is exactly why I had tried to avoid thinking of last night. Tossing my phone back onto my bed, I looked at the white lace still in my hands. This was the last pair. That part of our relationship was over and we would have to continue to see each other each day and keep our distance. No problem, I could do that. Walking over to my dresser, I opened my briefcase and set the panties inside. They would just join the others and I would get rid of them all at once. Which I had to admit sucked, because I really liked having them. Closing the lid, I stripped off the rest of my clothes and headed into the shower. I had problem to take care of before I met my family for lunch.

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I was determined to have a relaxing afternoon, with no intruding thoughts of Ms. Mills at all, as I entered my brother’s house. “Hello? Anybody here?” I called out as I closed the door behind me. A tiny giggle greeted me from the adjoining living room as I watched Carrington push herself up onto her feet and start waddling toward me. “Ah, ma petite chérie,” I felt the smile spread across my face as the curls of her blond pigtails bounced. She moved quickly and I swept her up into myarms. “Mo ankle bow,” she squealed as she wrapped her tiny arms around my neck and I chuckled, kissing her hair. “Mama!”

I stepped toward the kitchen and Rose walked out just as I reached it, leaning in she placed a kiss on Carrington’s cheek and then my own. “Don’t you *ever* knock, Bennett?” she asked in a sassy tone and swatted me with the spatula in her hand. “And what in the world are you teaching my daughter? She can’t even speak *English* well yet.”

“Vous aimeriez savoir, oui?,” I replied as I tapped the tip of her nose with my finger, causing her to press her lips together tightly. I could see that she was restraining from calling me a list of names, and I smirked at her knowing she wouldn’t in front of Carrington. “If you must know, I am teaching her how to say *mon oncle est beau*, which means ‘my uncle is handsome’.”

“Certainly think highly of yourself, don’t you, Ryan?” she retorted with a glare, but I could see the smirk starting to twitch at her lips; which soon became
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a small laugh. “Go on, you’ve kept your afternoon tea date waiting long enough.”

I laughed as I carried Carrington back into the living room where her tea set was already on the coffee table. I sat down on the couch and set her to stand on the floor between my legs, and began pointing to the different objects on the table. “CareBear, what’s this?”

She wrapped her hand around my finger as I pointed to the teapot. “Pot,” she drawled out slowly and then our hands moved together to the next object. “Cup.” I had to hold back a chuckle as her tiny lips popped on the ‘p’ and then moved over to the plate. “Cookie.”

“No,” I replied softly, shaking my head and watched her forehead furrow in concentration as she looked at the plate. “Cra..” I prompted her.

Her face suddenly lit up and her arms flew up in the air. “Witz!” she babbled excitedly with her attempt at Ritz and then climbed onto my leg and planted a wet kiss on my cheek.

“Is Mommy skimping on the cookies again?” I whispered and caused her to giggle, making a show of looking over my shoulder I pulled the small baggie of chocolate cookies out of my jacket pocket.

Opening the bag she reached in to grab one, and held it up to my mouth. I held her gaze for a moment with wide eyes and then made a sudden grab at the cookie with my lips, causing her to squeal with laughter.

“Ooh, did Uncle Ben bring cookies again?” Emmett bounced onto the couch beside us, grabbing a cookie from the baggie before I could pull it away. I glared at him since he knew I *detested* being called that by anyone but Carrington, and the smug grin on his face proved it.

“My cookie, Daddy!” Carrington objected loudly with a pout.

There was a loud crash in the kitchen, followed by an even louder ‘Bennett Anthony Ryan!’ that rivaled even my mother’s. I looked at Carrington and placed my finger to my lips and she giggled, as I shoved the baggie between myself and Emmett. I raised my gaze to meet Rose’s as she came storming out of the kitchen with the spatula. “Where are the cookies?”

“What cookies?” I asked innocently, glancing over at Emmett. “I haven’t seen any cookies. Have you?”

Emmett shook his head. “No baby, I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Rose pursed her lips, folded her arms to glare at us, and then pointed to my

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lap. “Then what is in your daughter’s hand, Emmett?”

“Cookie!” The little voice from my lap exclaimed proudly. We both looked down to Carrington’s hand, and sure enough there was a chocolate cookie. I chanced a look up at Rose and she shook her head. “I have warned you about that!”

“You snitched,” I whispered in Carrington’s ear before I handing her to Emmett as I sprung off the couch laughing. “Rose, calm down. She hasn’t even had one yet.”

“And she’s not *going* to!” she growled as she flicked the utensil in her hand toward me. “The next time you give her sugar, she’s going home with *you*!”

Carrington laughed and clapped from Emmett’s lap as Rose and I continued our chase around the living room. Emmett looked up as I passed the back of the couch. “Bennett, I wouldn’t mess with her.

Not the best time.”

Rose stopped behind the couch and pinched the muscle in his neck. “Be quiet, *honey*,” she said in a too sweet tone as Emmett winced, and then looked to Carrington with a loving smile. “Baby, can Mommy have the cookie? You can have it after lunch.”

I watched her hand the cookie over to Rose, and then Emmett sniffed the air. “Um, baby. Speaking of lunch…”

“Shhhh…. nickerdoodles,” Rose corrected herself at the last minute, and then ran into the kitchen. We heard another loud crash a moment later and Rose reappeared in the doorway. “Great. The quesadilla’s burned. So unless you *all* want to feast on Gerber Graduates, we’re going to have to go out. And this is *entirely* your fault, Bennett Ryan!”

I reached down to grab Carrington and propped her on my hip. “Come on, let’s go. My treat.”

We ended up at the old diner where we used to hang out during high school, and as usual, Carrington refused to sit in her highchair. Much to Rosalie’s dismay, I allowed her to once again sit in my lap to eat her lunch.

I was watching her munch on a french fry when a strange voice sounded beside us.

“Rosalie Hale?”

Rose looked up at the stranger and a shocked smile graced her face. “Jasper Whitlock? Oh my god,” she laughed excitedly and stood up to hug him. I

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glanced over at Emmett who was giving the man the once over with a raised eyebrow, and then turned my gaze to join my brother's. He was a tall, blonde man in his late twenties; no one I had ever seen before or recognized. Emmett cleared his throat and she pulled away from him and looked over to us. "Oh, sorry. This is Jasper, we were summer camp counselors in high school together. Jasper, this is my husband, Emmett Ryan and our daughter, Carrington. And this is his brother, Bennett."

Jasper was still shaking Emmett's hand when Rose motioned to me and his eyes went wide. "Bennett Ryan? As in Ryan Inc.?" he asked in an almost astonished tone and I nodded cautiously. "So you're the B… I mean, you're Chloe's boss, aren't you?"

The…Chloe's boss? What the hell is that supposed to mean?

"Bedda!" Carrington announced happily from my lap, causing everyone but me to laugh as I brought my gaze back up to him.

I nodded again. "Yes, Ms. Mills works for me," I answered warily, looking down to slowly shake his extended hand. So much for having a peaceful afternoon without thinking of her. I felt my jaw tighten slightly as I observed him. "And how are *you* acquainted with Ms. Mills?"

A smile came to his face and I immediately wanted to knock his teeth down his throat. "Oh, she's friends with my fiancée, Alice," he replied and then looked at his watch. "Which speaking of, I better get her lunch back to her. It was nice seeing you again, Rosalie."

Rose smirked slightly as she linked arms with Jasper. "Here, I'll walk you to the door," she replied in an almost amused tone as they walked away. Heading towards the door, I watched her immediately lean over to say something into his ear. I breathed out a sigh of relief. *Well at least he's fucking her friend and not her*; I thought and then shook my head. Where the hell did that come from?

I looked over to my brother who was smirking just as his wife had. "What's so funny, Emmett?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all," he chuckled as he popped another French fry in his mouth and then avoided my eyes.

Rose returned a moment later, laughing as she settled back beside Emmett. "Well, that was interesting. What a small world huh, Bennett?" she said in an almost teasing voice, a glint in her eye.

I furrowed my brow watching the both of them, as if they were both sharing some kind of inside joke.

It was beginning to really irritate me, until a French fry poked me in the cheek, refocusing my attention. I looked down at my niece and tickled her side lightly, and then turned back to my brother and his wife. “Oh yes, truly *fascinating*.”

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Sunday night as I lay in bed, I replayed my plan in my head. I just had to be tough, and make it a week.

Seven days, I could do that. Seven days of not touching her and this thing would be out of my system and I could move on with my life. There were just a few precautions I had to take.

First of all, I couldn’t be alone with her for more than a few minutes, for any reason. Second I couldn’t be goaded into arguing with her. For some sick reason, the two of us arguing was like some sick form of foreplay. And third, no more fantasizing about her. That meant no more reliving sexual encounters, no more fantasizing about new ones, and no more picturing her naked or with any of my body parts coming in contact with any of hers

And for the most part, things seemed to go according to plan. I was in a constant state of discomfort and the week seemed to drag on, but aside from a lot of dirty fantasies, I had remained in control. I tried my best to stay busy outside the office, but during the times we were forced together, I kept a constant distance, and for the most part we treated each other with the same polite distain as we had before.

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But part of me swore she was trying to break me. Each day it seemed that Ms. Mills looked sexier than the day before. Every day there was something about what she wore or did that brought my mind back to the gutter. I’d made a deal with myself that there would be no more lunch time

‘sessions’. I had to stop this and imagining her while masturbating wasn’t going to help.

Monday she wore her hair down. All I could think about as she sat across from me during a meeting was wrapping it around my hands as she went down on me. Tuesday she had on a form fitting knee length skirt and stockings with the seam up the back. She looked like some sort of hot secretary pin-up. Wednesday she wore a pant suit. That was unexpectedly worse, because I couldn’t get my mind off what it would feel like to slide those pants down her long legs. Thursday she had on a beautiful chocolate brown V neck blouse, and twice when she bent over to pick up my pen I got a good look down her shirt.
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Only one of those times was on purpose. By Friday I thought I would explode. I hadn't jacked off once all week and was walking around with the worst case of blue balls I'd ever had.

As I walked in Friday morning I prayed that maybe she would call in sick. But I knew I wasn't that lucky. I was horny and in a particularly bad mood, and when I opened the office door I almost had a heart attack. She was bent over watering a plant in a charcoal grey, short sleeved, turtleneck sweater dress. Every curve of her perfect body was shown to perfection. Someone up there really hated me.

"Good morning, Mr. Ryan." She said sweetly, stopping me as I passed her. Something was up. She never said anything sweetly to me. Turning slowly, I eyed her suspiciously.

"Good morning, Ms. Mills." I replied coolly. "You seem to be in an exceptionally cordial mood today.

Did somebody die?" I asked, not even trying to hide my annoyance.

Her smile dropped for a fraction of a second before the corner of her mouth lifted in a devilish smirk.

"Oh no. I'm just so excited to meet your friend Mike at dinner tomorrow. Emmett's told me all about him. I think we really might have a lot in common."

Son of a bitch. My mouth dropped and my eyebrows furrowed. "Oh yes, dinner tomorrow. I'd completely forgotten. Yes, you and Mike… well since he's a mama's boy and you're an overbearing shrew you two should even each other out pretty well." *Nice one, Ryan.* "I'll take some coffee now, Ms. Mills," I said smugly as I turned and headed into my office. *So much for the rule about not arguing with her.* As I set my things down, the thought occurred to me that it may not be in my best interest to have her make my coffee. One of these days she was liable to put something in it.

Sitting at my desk, I tried to get to work. God, why was this thing with Mike bothering me so much?

I'd considered the fact that I could be jealous. But that was ridiculous; I didn't want any type of relationship with her. I just wanted to be able to fuck her whenever and wherever I wanted with no strings attached. Was that so bad? Shit. That was bad even for me.

Besides that, she wouldn't be interested in him, would she? Hadn't Emmett said that she was out of his league? Was she? Hell yeah, she was.

And I knew that one day, whether now or later, someone was going to steal

her away. Wait, did I just say steal her? I had to get myself together. I knew she dated sometimes. I'd even seen flowers delivered to the office once or twice. But it had never brought out this…possessive feeling in me.

Yeah, that was the word. Possessive. It wasn't jealousy, because that would mean that I had some sort of romantic feelings for her. Possessive implied that I …well that we… Fuck.

Frustrated, I stood up and ran my hands roughly through my hair as I walked towards the large plate glass windows. Even I couldn't make this not sound crazy. How had this even happened? Nine months ago I was living my life happily a world away in Paris. I had everything a man could want. I was wealthy and successful. I had my choice of any woman I desired, and now? Here I was, a total fucking mess over some angry woman I didn't even want. Well I wanted her, just not like…God, I couldn't think about this anymore.

I was interrupted from my insane ramblings by a knock at my door.

"Come in," I grumbled irritably. It was obvious that she was still pissed as she walked in and headed straight for my desk. Placing my coffee down, she turned to look at me.

"Are we having the scheduling meeting this morning, Mr. Ryan?" She was standing near my desk in a pool of sunlight. Shadows draped across her dress, accentuating the curve of her breasts. Was it cold in here? How could she be cold when I was sweating bullets? Just the thought of what those breasts looked like naked, had me hard. Fuck! I had to get the hell out of here.

"No. I forgot about a meeting I have downtown this afternoon. So, I'll be leaving for the day in about 10 minutes. Just email me all the details," I replied quickly heading for the safety and coverage of my desk.

"I wasn't aware of any meeting today," she asked skeptically, her brows coming together and her lower lip pouting a bit.

"No, you wouldn't have been," I said, suddenly becoming interested in the papers on my desk. "It's *personal*." When she didn't respond I chanced a glance up, she had a strange expression on her face.

What was that look? She obviously looked mad, but there was something else. Was she…was she *jealous*? God I hoped so. *What the fuck, Ryan?*

"Oh," she answered softly, chewing on her lower lip. "Is it someone I know?" She never asked me questions about where I was going. "I mean, just in case your father or brother need to get a hold of you," she added in a rushed voice.

“Well,” I paused, trying to torture her a bit, “If someone needs to get a hold of me, they can call my cell phone.” If this wasn’t my life, this would almost be funny. Other than our first meeting, never in the entire time that I had known her had she ever acted less than completely collected in front of me. “Is there something else, Ms. Mills?” I asked looking up at her.

She stood there for a moment not speaking, seeming to be fight some internal battle. Suddenly she lifted her chin and straightened her shoulders, “Since you won’t be here, I was thinking that I’d like to start the weekend early. Maybe do some shopping for tomorrow night.”

I sat in my chair, trying to decipher the look on her face. What game was she playing? I kept telling myself that her becoming involved with someone was a good thing. If she was with someone, I would cease to be a temptation and life could get back to normal.

“No problem,” I answered coolly, steeling my expression. “I’ll just see you tomorrow.” Our gazes locked across the desk, and the electricity in the air was so palpable, I could feel my heart rate increase. She waited a minute more, and I tried like hell not to notice her perfect nipples still evident through her dress.

“Have a nice *meeting*, *sir*,” she said through clenched teeth, leaving quickly and closing the door loudly behind her. I sat there completely stunned. What the hell just happened? Did she think I was meeting someone? And why the hell would she care?

I was relieved when I heard her leave fifteen minutes later. Deciding it was now safe to leave my office I gathered up my things and headed out. I was stopped just as I reached the outer office door by a man carrying a large flower arrangement.

“Can I help you with something?” I asked the man skeptically. Surely he had to have the wrong office.

Looking up from his clipboard he looked around the office before answering, “I have a delivery for a Ms. Chloe Mills?” What the? Who the hell would send her flowers? Was she seeing someone while we were…? I couldn’t even finish the thought.

“Ms. Mills has gone for lunch. She’ll be back in about an hour,” I lied in a tone a bit rougher than usual. I had to get a look at that card. “I’ll sign for those and make sure that she gets them.” He handed me the flowers and I set them on her desk. Signing the clipboard quickly I handed him a tip and watched thankfully as he left. For three long minutes I stood and looked at those flowers,

willing myself to stop being such a girl and not look at the card. *Roses*. She despises roses. I snickered because whoever sent her these knew nothing about her. Even I knew she didn't like roses. I'd overheard her talking to Angela one day about how one of her dates sent her roses to the office. She'd immediately given them away, disliking the pungent scent. Finally my curiosity got the better of me and I ripped the card away from the arrangement. *Why that smooth son of a bitch.*

Counting down the days 'til we meet.

Sincerely,

EBOOK ECXLUSIVE

Mike Newton

A foreign sensation slowly spread through my chest as I crumpled the card in my fist. Retrieving the flowers from her desk I walked out the door, locking up behind me, and made my way down the hall to the elevator. Just as the doors opened I passed a wide chrome garbage can and without a second glance I dropped them in.

I didn’t know what the fuck was going on with me. But I did know there was no way in hell she was going out with Mike Newton.

EBOOK ECXLUSIVE

SEVEN – Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?

The hour-long drive to my parents' house was spent attempting to calm myself and to get my thoughts in order. My carefully laid plans of getting Ms. Mills out of my system and into the arms of another man had gone horribly wrong somewhere. Looking back now I could see that it was wrong for me to throw the flowers away. But at the time, nothing else mattered but getting rid of those *things* that were making my stomach burn. Leaning farther back into the seat, I tried to let the soothing sound of the car engine calm me. It wasn't working.

So here were the facts. I felt possessive of her. Not in a *romantic* sort of way; in a "hit her over the head, drag her off by the hair, and fuck her" way. Like she was my toy and I was keeping the other boys in the sandbox from playing with her. God. How fucking sick was that? She was right. If she ever heard me admit to that, she would cut my balls off and feed them to me. I shifted uncomfortably in the seat at the thought. For the millionth time, the idea of trying to figure out a way to just enjoy the sex without any strings ran through my head. But I knew it would never work. Besides the fact that there wasn't a chance in hell she would ever agree, I just couldn't continue to feed that needy part of my personality. Bennett Ryan did not let a woman control him. Ever.

Now the question was how to proceed. Obviously Mike was interested. How could he not be? All he had was second hand information from my family, who obviously adored her, and I'm sure at least a photograph. If those were the only pieces of the puzzle I had about her I'd be interested too. There was no way he could have actually had a conversation with her and still find her appealing. *Unless he just wanted to fuck her.* The sound of the leather steering wheel straining under my grip told me I would be better off not thinking about that. And I'm sure he wouldn't be meeting her at my parents' home if that were all he was interested in. Hmm…maybe he actually wanted to get to know her better. Hell, even I had been a bit intrigued before we actually spoke. But she'd proven to be one of the most aggravating, defensive, and unpleasant people I'd ever met. Unfortunately for me, she was also the best sex I'd ever had. Fuck, he'd better never get that far.

I still remembered the first moment I'd seen her. My parents had come to visit me one Christmas while I was living in Paris, and one of my gifts had been a digital photo frame. While going through the photos with my mom, I stopped at one of my parents and a beautiful brown-haired girl.

PROOF EXCLUSIVE

“Mom, who is this girl with you and dad?” I remembered asking. She had explained that her name was Chloe Mills, and that she worked as an assistant for one of the lower level executives, and that they all just loved her. She was probably twenty-three in the photograph, and I instantly thought she was one of the most beautiful women I’d ever seen. She wasn’t the type of girl I usually dated, but I was captivated with her nonetheless.

Over the years her face would pop up once in a while in photos that my mom sent to me; company functions, Christmas parties, even parties at the house. Her name was brought up occasionally as my family recounted stories to me about the general goings on of work and life. So when the decision was made that I would come home and take over as CFO, my father immediately suggested her as my new assistant. My family loved and trusted her, and the fact that my father and brother had absolutely no reservations about her ability to handle the job spoke volumes. I immediately agreed. I was a bit worried that my appreciation for her appearance would interfere with my ability to be her boss, but quickly reassured myself that the world was full of beautiful women and it would be easy enough to separate the two.

But when I saw her in person that first time; laughing and joking, repeating quotes from one of my favorite movies, I realized I was in trouble. Beautiful didn’t even cover it. She was stunning. Dark chestnut hair pinned up into a pile of curls, a dark brown form fitting skirt, short sleeve white blouse and the sexiest shoes I’d ever seen. When she’d not realized I’d entered and backed into me laughing, inadvertently causing her ass to rub against my thigh, I *knew* I was in trouble. *Big* trouble. I remember barely even being able to form the words I needed to speak. She turned around quickly and I was met with the same beautiful brown eyes I had seen in her photographs.

EBOOKEXCLUSIVE

However even in their shocked and widened state, it was still painfully obvious that her photographs had not done her justice; painfully in the most literal of terms. I had to clench my jaw to contain the arousal that shot through me with that first look. I watched her lips as she began to apologize, and I immediately knew that this was a working relationship that could not work well. It would be far too difficult to keep a professional frame of mind working in such close quarters with this amazingly beautiful woman.

I barely noticed her co-worker approach me and speak, until I heard her refer to my brother as

‘Emmett’. This caught my attention and piqued my interest. As soon as I glanced at her, she seemed intimidated and nervous. And it was then that it hit

me; they were accustomed to a casual and friendly environment in the workplace. And knowing my father and my brother, it wasn't difficult to imagine. Playing the stern, intolerable boss would cause her nervousness; nervousness leads to careless mistakes. And above all, she would keep her distance.

So I portrayed the arrogant prick; addressing them both formally, insisting on *being* addressed formally, and requesting an immediate disciplinary meeting with Ms. Mills. But in reality; I just needed to get out of there. To retreat back to my office for the five minutes of peace I was sure would be enough. I stalked out of there in a haughty fashion and slammed my office door behind me, leaning back on it to regain some composure.

I was soon presented the distraction of a phone call. It was my friend Jean in Paris, who was still arranging to have some of the artwork I had purchased for my flat there to be shipped over here. I was in the middle of jotting down the tracking information when I heard the knock on my office door; I called out a stern acknowledgement, and sensed her presence without even looking up. It shouldn't be this difficult for me to be professional; I took business very seriously; almost *too* seriously, according to my family. But I hadn't gotten where I was today by taking the light approach to things. I worked hard, and I expected the same from my employees.

But something about her was different, and from the first moment I couldn't place my finger on it. I knew that steeling myself to her was going to take some work, so I kept my eyes on the notepad in front of me to keep the stern tone in my voice as I spoke to her. Then I made the mistake of looking up, and the erection I had been fighting from the moment she backed into me was back in full force.

But apparently the arrogant quirked eyebrow was convincing, and she nearly stuttered her response.

Excellent. Success. I thought to myself until she suddenly came hurling toward me as she tripped, spilling my coffee onto my lap. "Shit!" I exclaimed, feeling the hot liquid seep through the fabric and right against my fully erect cock. I hissed through my teeth and pinched my eyes shut, trying to will away the excruciating pain. That was until I felt something rubbing against the crotch of my pants; and I opened my eyes to see Ms. Mills on her knees in front of me, rubbing a towel against the entire length of my erection. "You may leave now, Ms. Mills," I nearly growled through a clenched jaw, needing her hand out of my lap, and her presence out of this room. I was absolutely mortified. There was no

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way she couldn't have noticed that. As soon as the door closed behind her, I let out a heavy sigh and walked into the closet of the adjoining bathroom for a fresh pair of pants and boxers.

Pulling my pants off, I winced. Not from the heat of the coffee – the thickness of the fabric had taken the brunt of that. But more from the effect Ms. Mills had had on me. Her voice, her scent, and last but not least, her touch had sent my senses into overdrive and I was harder than I had every remembered being. "Damn you," I growled as I tried to pull on the fresh pair of boxers. There was no way I would get through the day like this. What the hell was so different about this woman that she made me so hard I was actually considering jerking off *in my office bathroom*?! However, I didn't see that I had much of a choice; I would never get through the day like this.

And now, I could see all the mistakes I had made over the last few months. From that first day, it was all leading up to this. I had never been so sexually attracted to anyone in my entire life. And I'd been so mistaken thinking that once would be enough. If only the sex wasn't *so* fucking good. My dick hardened at the thought. *Fucking traitor*. It had been a whole week since I'd had any release, and now that I thought about it that might not have been the best plan either. It probably would have helped my resolve if I would have, um… relieved some stress before tonight. The problem was that I couldn't seem to seal the deal lately without thinking of her. Just the thought of the last time I tried was enough to make my dick shrink.

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It was a few days before the 'window incident' as I was now referring to it, and I had a charity event to attend that night. Coming into the office I was stunned to see Ms. Mills in this incredibly sexy blue dress I'd never seen before. The minute I saw her I'd wanted to throw her on the desk and fuck her senseless. But instead I'd stormed around there all day, slamming doors and generally being an ass.

All that night with my beautiful blonde trophy date by my side, I'd been distracted. I knew I was coming to the end of my rope and eventually I was going to snap. I just had no idea exactly how soon that would be.

Like the ass that I am, I tried to prove to myself that Ms. Mills wasn't really getting inside my head by going home with my date. Stumbling into her apartment we kissed and undressed quickly, but I felt as if I was moving outside myself. It's not that she wasn't beautiful and sexy; but as I lay her down, it was mahogany hair I was envisioning spread across the white pillow. Kissing her breasts; it was soft full ones, not perfect silicone I wanted my lips running over.

And even as I rolled on the condom and plunged into her, I knew she was just a faceless body I was using for my own selfish needs. But once she had already orgasmed twice, it became obvious I wasn't going to be able to come like this. I tried to keep her from my thoughts, but was unable to keep the forbidden images of what it would be like to have her under me from flashing through my mind. I came hard and hated myself. How could I have let this happen? God, I was such a prick.

Scrubbing my hand across my face, I was even more disgusted with the memory now than when it happened. I glanced at the clock and saw that I only had another ten minutes before I would arrive. I still didn't even know what my plan was. I could have just played it by ear, but that wasn't the way I usually did things. I was always so particular and calculated in every action. I knew that if I could make it through tonight, things would get easier. They *had* to. We had that damn conference in Seattle coming up and if this shit wasn't straightened out soon, who knows what would happen?

Right. I knew exactly what would happen. God just the image of having her naked and on top of me in the hotel bed made my dick suddenly forget about feeling guilty. How in the hell was I going to get through tonight?

Pulling through the gate of my parent's home, I tried to clear my head of all sexual thoughts. It was harder than I would have imagined. Parking the car and heading inside, I mentally chanted 'You can do this' over and over to myself. I walked into the house and passed through the dining room only to see that the table wasn't even set. "Mom?" I called out questioningly; looking into each room I passed.

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"Out here, Bennett," I heard her call from the back patio. Opening the large French doors I was greeted with the smiling face of my mother as she put the finishing touches on the outdoor table.

I leaned over so she could kiss me, and of course try to rearrange my hair, and then asked. "So why are we eating out here tonight?"

"It's just such a lovely afternoon, and I thought it might make everyone more comfortable being out here. You don't think anyone will mind do you?" she asked, suddenly concerned.

"Of course not, it's beautiful out here, mom. Don't worry." And it was beautiful. The large patio was topped with a massive white pergola, draped in purple wisteria. The centerpiece was a large rectangular dining table that sat eight; it was covered in a soft ivory tablecloth and antiqued ivory dishes. Candles and soft lavender and blue flowers overflowed small silver pitchers

running the length of the table. Hanging from the pergola overhead was a crystal candelabra, the entire thing looked like something out of an issue of Better Homes & Gardens. “You do know that not even *I* can keep CareBear from tearing this stuff off the table don’t you?” I questioned as I popped a grape from a platter on the sideboard. I could just imagine what those fat little fists would do to all the delicate things set up on the table before me.

“Oh honey, you don’t really think I would let a fourteen month old come to an adult dinner party, do you? If Carrington was here all the attention would be on her,” she replied happily. *Shit*. With Carrington in my lap I would have something to distract me from Mike mentally undressing Ms. Mills right in front of me. “Not to mention what she would do to my table. Anyway tonight is about Chloe.

I’m really hoping that Chloe and Mike hit it off,” she continued flitting around the patio, lighting candles and making last minute touch ups; completely unaware of my anguish.

I was screwed. As I was contemplating making a run for it, I heard the boisterous voice of my brother coming into the house. “Where is everybody?” he yelled, his deep voice echoing through the empty house. Opening the door for my mother, we walked into the house, finding my brother in the kitchen.

“Sooooo. Bennett, my brother,” he chortled, leaning his large frame against the counter. “Excited about tonight?” Why did he always look like he was up to no good? Bending down, he enclosed our mom into a large hug causing her to giggle. I waited until she had left the room again to eye him skeptically.

“Is there some reason why I should be?” I asked shrugging my shoulders nonchalantly.

“Well, this should be an interesting night, watching Newton make a play for Chloe in front of everyone. Could make for an entertaining evening. Don’t you think?” Just as he was pulling a chunk of bread from one of the large loaves on the counter, Rosalie walked in and swatted his hands away.

“Do you want to send your mother into a fit by ruining the dinner she has planned? You be nice tonight, Emmett. No teasing or joking with Chloe. You know she has to be nervous enough about all this. Lord knows she puts up with enough shit from this one,” she said, gesturing towards me.

“What are you talking about?” I shouted in an irritated tone. I was growing tired of the constant Chloe pity party within my family. “I haven’t done anything to her.” Rose and I got along as well as any siblings, by blood or marriage,

could. I loved her dearly, but if there was one person you didn't want on your bad side it was Rose. She raised an eyebrow, crossing her arms over her chest as she stared at me.

"Oh really, Mr. Sweetheart? Would you like to know what Chloe calls you? What they *all* call you?"

Somehow I didn't think I wanted to know. She smiled sweetly at me, sensing my disdain. "Beautiful Bastard." My brother chose this moment to burst into hysterical laughter. *What? She called me that?*

"What's so funny?" My father asked, walking into the room. *Great.* Just the person I did not want to hear this.

"I knew it," Emmett cackled wiping the tears from his eyes. "I overheard her and Angela talking about it one day. I knew they had to be talking about you."

"Why exactly is this so funny to you?" I retorted glaring at my brother. "And how did you know?" I asked returning my gaze to Rosalie.

"Jasper, my friend we ran into at lunch last weekend? He's engaged to Chloe's friend, Alice, the one that works for Gucci. Apparently she started calling you that the day you started. Pretty clever girl if you ask me," she replied, shrugging in an almost challenging way.

"Wait," my father interrupted, and I mentally groaned. "What does Chloe call you?" *God, could this get any worse?*

"Beautiful Bastard?" my mom chimed in casually, walking into the kitchen. "Is that what we're talking about?" Even my mom knew? Now Rose and my dad were laughing.

"Mom! You knew?" How could this be happening to me? And what the hell was a name like 'Beautiful Bastard' supposed to mean anyway? She thinks I'm a bastard? I mean, I knew I acted like it sometimes, but I didn't know she'd created my own little nickname. Wait, then that also meant she thought I was beautiful. Coming from her, I wasn't sure whether to take that as a compliment or an insult. Not that it mattered either way.

"Of course I knew, Bennett. Chloe's worked for the company for six years. She tells me most things," she said casually, as she sliced up the loaves of bread. If that thought didn't scare the hell out of me; I didn't know what would. "And she didn't actually *tell* me. It slipped one day when I had lunch with her and Angela. And to be honest, I thought it was quite funny. I love you Bennett," she said, walking towards me and rustling my hair. "But you do have a tendency to be a bit gruff at times." I rolled my eyes and pulled my head away from her hand

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as she laughed. *Had the world gone completely insane?*

"Bennett." My father motioned for me to come with him. "I did have something I wanted to speak with you about. Please be on your best behavior tonight. I realize you and Chloe don't get along, but even you have to admit that she deserves your respect." Clenching my jaw tightly, I nodded in agreement. I still couldn't believe she called me that. Shit. *And for the last nine months?* I mean, I guess I had earned it; I had in my own way spent the first three months hoping that she would just give up and quit. But she surprised me with her determination. And since then, it had only gotten worse. The more I wanted her, the bigger jerk I became.

I was brought out of my musings by the ringing of the doorbell. My heart rate sped up at the possibility of it being her already. I heard my parents go to the door and felt a sense of relief to hear that it was only Mike. We had been good friends in school, but I hadn't seen him since coming home.

They greeted each other and made their way into the back of the house where the rest of us were.

Mike hadn't changed much in the ten years since we'd seen each other. He was a bit shorter than me, with a slim build, sandy blond hair and blue eyes; and could, I suppose, be what women would consider attractive. Which only heightened my determination to keep Ms. Mills out of his grasp.

"Bennett," He said excitedly, reaching out to shake my hand. "God, man. How long has it been?"

"A long time, Mike. I think since right after high school." I answered, shaking his hand firmly. "How have you been?"

"Great. Things have been really great, Bennett. How about you? I've seen your pictures in magazines, so I guess you're doing pretty well for yourself," he replied with an honest smile, slapping my shoulder gently.

I gave a small nod and a forced smile in return. Leaving Mike and the others to talk, I decided I needed a few more minutes; I headed up the stairs to my old room to think. Just walking through the door, I felt calmer. The room had changed little since I was seventeen; even while out of the country, my parents kept it virtually the same as the day I left for college. Sitting on my old bed I thought about having her actually becoming involved with Mike. He really was a nice guy, and they might hit it off. But God, just the thought of another man touching her or being inside her made every muscle in my body clench. I thought back to the moment in the car when I told her I couldn't stop. Even now,

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with all my false bravado, I didn't know if I could. My body was aching to feel her again. It had only been seven days, and as much as I tried to pretend it wasn't true, it was the only thing I could think about.

Hearing voices from downstairs, I decided it was time to man up and face the music. As I cleared the final landing I saw her. Her back was to me, and the air left my lungs. It was white. Dear God in heaven why did it have to be white. She was wearing some sort of eyelet summer dress that stopped right above the knee and showed off her beautiful long legs. The top was made of the same material, was sleeveless and tied in thin ribbons across the top of each shoulder. All I could think of was how much I would love to pull that delicate ribbon and see it fall around her waist. I thought for a second I was going to have to go back upstairs, but then she turned around. Our eyes met across the room and I knew there was no way I would make it tonight. She looked so beautiful.

And then a smile graced her lips that looked so genuine even I almost believed it. I knew it was only for show for my parents and Mike. Of course she would try to play sweet. "Good evening, Mr. Ryan," she said in a soft innocent tone.

My jaw clenched in amusement; playing the part in front of my family. "Ms. Mills," I replied, bowing my head slightly in a similarly polite gesture, and watching her eyes as they fought against narrowing. Our gaze never broke, even as my mother called everyone onto the patio for drinks before dinner. As she started to pass me, I turned my head to speak in a low voice that only she could hear.

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"Successful shopping trip yesterday?"

Her eyes met mine slowly, that same angelic smile on her face. "Wouldn't you like to know, Mr. Ryan," she replied in a soft sarcastic voice, and placed her hand against the front of my shoulder as she began to walk past again. I felt my entire body stiffen slightly, even from such simple contact with her. My plan was crumbling around me. "By the way, there are new garter belts in stock."

Her chuckle echoed through the hall as she walked away to catch up with Mike, but my cock throbbed at her words. She was going to torture me with this. *Game on, Ms Mills.*

"I really hope you didn't mind the flowers I sent to your office yesterday. I admit it was a bit much, but I've been looking forward to meeting you," Mike asked her and I felt a knot tighten in my gut as her head turned back to look at me.

"Flowers? I had flowers delivered to me?" she asked with a furrowed brow

and accusing eyes.

I shrugged casually and shook my head. “No, I didn’t see any,” I lied and walked by them to make my way outside to make myself a drink. She was going to kill me if she found out.

I kept my gaze locked on her all evening and when dinner finally began, it was apparent that things were going relatively smoothly between her and Mike. She was even flirting with him at times. *Not going to happen*.

“So Chloe, Mr. and Mrs. Ryan tell me you’re from Washington?” Mike’s voice broke my focus on her, and I looked over to see him smiling at her sweetly.

Chloe also appeared to be taken by surprise by the sudden inquiry and took a moment before nodding. “Uh, yes. My dad is a police chief there, and I chose to remain with him when my parents divorced. Never was much of a big city girl; Seattle was terrifying enough for me.” A small chuckle escaped, and her eyes to shot to me. “Is there something *funny* about that, Mr. Ryan?”

I smirked as I took a sip of my wine, staring at her from above the rim. Her brow rose expectantly as I set the glass down and licked my lips. “I’m sorry, Ms. Mills. I just find it fascinating that you don’t like the city, and yet you choose the third largest city in the U.S. to live in.”

Her jaw twitched infinitesimally as she fought to maintain her composure. But then the smile returned to her face, and her chin rested on her folded hands. The look in her eyes told me that under any other circumstances, I would either already be naked with her on top of me or lying in a pool of my own blood on the rug. “Actually, Mr. Ryan. My father remarried and my mother was *born* here.

And I came to spend some time with her before she passed.” She held my gaze for a moment and I had to admit I felt a hint of guilt twisting in my chest. But it was quickly suppressed as she looked back over at Mike, biting her lip in the innocent way that only she could make look so damn sexy.

Stop flirting with him.

My fists clenched as they continued to speak to each other, but my breath stilled as I felt something touch my leg. As I was about to glance under the table, what was now undeniably her foot began creeping up my pant leg. I watched her lips as they closed around her fork, and felt my cock harden as her tongue slowly ran across them to remove the traces of marinade left behind by the fish.

“Wow, top five percent of your class at Northwestern. Nice!” I heard Mike say and then he looked over to speak to me. “Bet you’re glad to have someone so amazing working under you, huh?”

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Chloe coughed slightly, bringing her napkin up from her lap to cover her mouth. I smiled as I quickly glanced over to her and then back to Mike. “Yes, it’s absolutely amazing having Ms. Mills under me.

She always gets the job done.”

“Aw, Bennett. That is so sweet of you,” my mother gushed, and I watched Ms. Mills’s face begin to redden. And while everyone else smiled around us at the assumed endearment, her eyes shot daggers at me. Suddenly I felt her foot at my crotch, pressing against my aching erection, causing me to choke on the wine I had been sipping.

“Are you alright, Mr. Ryan?” she asked in faux concern, to which I nodded with venom in my gaze.

She smiled and then looked back over to Mike. “So how about you? Are you from Chicago?”

The toe of her shoe continued to rub gently against me and I tried to keep in control of my breathing.

As he began telling her about his childhood, going to school with us, and finally talking about his successful accounting business; I watched her face lose the feigned interest, replaced instead by genuine intrigue. *No. Don’t go there, Mike*. I slid my left hand under the tablecloth and met the skin of her ankle, watching her jump slightly at the contact. I traced my fingertips in light circles around her anklebone, causing her foot to twitch slightly.

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But then Mike mentioned that he would like to meet with her for lunch sometime this week. And my hand came to cover the top of her foot, pressing her more firmly against my cock. She merely smirked again.

“You wouldn’t mind, would you, Bennett?” Mike asked with a cheerful expression, his arm resting over the back of Chloe’s chair, and my leg began to bounce to restrain myself from reaching across the table for his throat.

“Oh speaking of lunch dates,” Rose interrupted tapping my arm with her hand. “You remember my friend, Megan? You met her last month at the house. Mid-twenties, my height, blond hair, blue eyes.

Anyway, she asked for your number. Are you interested?”

I glanced back over to Chloe when I felt the tendons in her foot tighten, and I watched her swallow slowly as she waited for my answer. “Sure. You know I prefer blonds, Rose. Might make for a nice change of scenery.”

I had to restrain from yelling out as I felt her heel shove slightly against my

balls before her foot pulled away from my hold. She lifted the napkin from her lap and gaze met mine again, her jaw clenched in restraint. “Excuse me, I need to use the ladies room,” she snapped, tossing the napkin on the table and standing up from the table before heading back into the house.

“Bennett,” I heard my father’s stern voice and I turned to look at him. “I thought we talked about this.”

I grabbed my wine glass roughly and brought it to my lips. “I don’t know what you mean,” I replied, trying to keep my voice calm before taking a sip.

“Bennett,” my mother added, the severe look I remembered from my childhood showing in her eyes.

“I think you should go apologize.”

“For what?!” I exclaimed, setting down my glass a little too roughly.

“Bennett!” my father said sharply, leaving no room for argument and I tossed my napkin on the table and pushed roughly away from the table.

I stormed through the house angrily, searching each bathroom on the first two floors, until finally reaching the third floor where one of the bathroom door’s was closed. Standing outside, my hand resting on the knob, I waged an internal battle. If I went in there, what would happen? There was only one thing I wanted to do, and it wasn’t talking. I thought about knocking, but I knew for a fact she wouldn’t open. I listened carefully for any sign of noise but heard nothing. Turning the knob slowly, I was surprised to find it unlocked. Anger was still coursing through my veins at the very thought of him touching her.

I’d only been in this room a few times since my mother had remodeled it. Set on the third floor, it was rarely used. It struck me as odd that in this large house, this was the bathroom that Ms. Mills would choose to use. Perhaps she knew I would follow her? Is that why the door was left unlocked? My pulse pounded furiously in my ears at the very thought.

It was a beautiful, Victorian styled room. It housed a claw foot tub, a pedestal sink, a separate water closet and an elegant dressing table covered with mirrored trays, a standing antique oval mirror and various lead glass bottles of lotions and perfumes. Above the table was a small lace covered window that overlooked the patio and grounds below. She was sitting on a small bench in front of the table, looking so feminine and delicate in that lovely white dress. It was almost as if she belonged in this beautiful room.

“What are you doing in here?” she said quietly, looking up at me from the small oval mirror atop the dressing table. Taking the cap off her lipstick, she

applied it slowly to her perfect lips, her eyes never leaving mine.

“Oh, I think you know exactly what I’m doing here.” I answered quietly, reaching behind me to turn the lock on the bathroom door, the audible click ringing in the silent room. Still holding my gaze in the mirror, I could see the heavy rise and fall of her chest reflecting back at me. She was every bit as worked up as I was. The thought brought the corner of my mouth up into a smirk, and she glared at me in response.

“Well, despite what you might think,” she said gathering her cosmetics into her small bag, “You had better be getting back. Your family will be missing you.”

“No. Actually they won’t,” I said, continuing to smirk at her, “My father actually sent me up here to find you. Apparently, he seems to think I owe you some sort of apology.”

“Right,” she mumbled under her breath.

“You see,” I replied coolly, slowly closing the distance between us. “My father, or anyone else for that matter, is completely unaware of the little game you were playing with me under the table.” Her eyes widened slightly and her breath hitched the tiniest bit.

“Such a naughty little tease.”

“Well, no one might miss you. But I definitely have someone waiting for me.” She stood and turned to leave, brushing my shoulder as she passed. Stepping in her path, I pressed my hand to the door, blocking her from opening it.

“I don’t think so, Ms. Mills,” I whispered, leaning closer to her face. “I think the two of us have something to discuss. You aren’t going anywhere with him.” My lips lightly grazed just under her ear, and I felt her body tremor with the contact. “You see, he wants something that’s mine, and he can’t have it.”

Her eyes closed briefly at my words and her body stiffened. “I can do anything I want, Mr. Ryan,” she said softly. I could see the affect I was having on her; her skin was covered in goose bumps and her quickened breath brushed against my shirt. Slowly she raised her eyes to me, and her gaze hardened.

“And I am not yours.”

“You might think that,” I whispered, my lips ghosting along the column of her neck. “But your body,” I said, running my hands under her skirt and pressing my hand against the damp lace. “Says something different.”

Her eyes closed and she let out a low moan as my fingers traced slow circles

around her clit. “Fuck you.” The words were quiet and I felt them vibrate against my lips.

“Let me,” I said huskily into her neck. She moaned at my words, and I roughly pushed her against the bathroom door. Grabbing each of her hands, I raised them above her head, holding them captive in my own, causing her to moan. She really did like it rough. I’d have to remember that for another time. Before I could even chastise myself for thinking that I leaned in and crashed my lips to hers. The rush I felt at just kissing her spurred me on and I pressed my hardened cock against her.

“Oh, God,” she hissed as her head tilted to the side, allowing me access to her gorgeous neck. “We can’t do this.” I ran my lips down and across her collarbone to her shoulder.

Shifting both her hands into one of mine, I reached down and slowly pulled the thin string holding her top together, kissing along the newly exposed skin. Moving to the other side I repeated the action and was soon rewarded when it slipped down revealing an incredibly sexy white lace strapless bra.

Fuck. Did this woman own anything that didn’t make me hard? My mouth trailed down to her breasts while my free hand moved to the clasp of her bra. There was no way I was missing the sight of her bare breasts this time. It opened easily and the lace fell away, revealing the vision that filled every one of my fantasies. Taking one pink nipple into my mouth, she moaned loudly and her knees buckled slightly. “Shhh,” I whispered against her skin.

I lifted her slightly and she wrapped her legs around my waist, bringing our bodies together more firmly; we both groaned at the sensation. I released her hands and she immediately brought them to my hair, roughly pulling me closer. Fuck, I loved it when she did that. Pushing her more firmly against the door, I realized there were too many clothes in the way; I wanted to feel the heat of her skin against my own. She seemed to read my mind as her fingers quickly moved down my sides and began pulling my shirt free from my pants; lifting it up and over my head. The feeling of her naked breasts against my bare chest caused another wave of lust to shoot through me.

The sound of laughter outside floated up through the slightly open window, causing her to tense.

Looking up at her, I saw the different emotions flash across her face. Her eyes met mine and she looked like she was struggling with what she wanted to say. “We shouldn’t do this,” she said, shaking her head slightly. She made a move to send me away and I pushed her more firmly into the door.

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“He’s waiting for me.”

“Do you want him?” I asked roughly as rage began to boil inside me. There was no way he would have her like this. “Answer me,” I repeated, even more angry. Her eyes bore into mine but she didn’t speak.

Setting her down roughly, I pulled her to the dressing table and stood behind her. From where we stood, we had a perfect view of the patio. In particular of Mike, and that thought alone almost made me smile.

Gripping her hair in my hands, I pulled her bare back to my chest and brought my mouth to her ear.

“Do you see him?” I asked, my hands beginning to slide along her breasts. “Look at him.” I skimmed my hands down her abdomen, along her skirt and to her thighs. “Does he make you feel like this?” My fingers floated up her thigh and into her panties. A low hiss escaped my mouth as I felt the wetness there. She groaned and pushed her hips back into me. Perfect. “What do you want?” I whispered against her shoulder.

“Fuck. I don’t know,” she answered desperately. But even as she said the words her hips continued to grind into me.

My fingers continued to slide in and out of her, and I wanted it to be my cock more than anything.

“Look at him, Chloe. You know what you want.” She let out a whispered curse at the use of her name.

And God it felt *so* good to say it.

“Fuck me. Please. I need to feel you inside me.” She didn’t need to ask me twice, and I quickly undid my pants and pushed them down my legs. Lifting up her skirt I gripped her panties in my hands, with the intention of pulling them down when she whispered. “Rip them.” Fuck, I love that she likes that.

I’d never been able to be this raw and primal with anyone before. God, that fucking turned me on.

Pulling them into my fist, they tore easily, and she let out a groan as the fabric pulled from her body.

After throwing them to the floor, I began running my hands up her body and to her shoulders, I let my fingers slide down her arms, to her hands; placing them on the table in front of us, bending her over slightly. I grasped my cock in my hand and teased her entrance with the tip.

My cock twitched at the sight before me; her beautiful body bent over at the

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waist, skirt over her hips, her perfect ass on display, and I briefly wondered if she had ever been taken that way. Being with her made me want to try things I'd never wanted to before. And I wanted to be the one showing her. Just the thought had me biting my lip as I slid slowly inside.

God it had been too long. How did I think I could manage to stay away from this? We both moaned as I pulled out and slid in again. Bending over I placed a kiss and another "Shhh" on her back. I groaned as she pushed her hips back into me, pushing me farther into her. I knew I couldn't last long if she kept that up, but the urge to thrust was becoming too strong.

More laughter came from outside, and I was briefly brought out of my thoughts. Mike was down there and he wanted to take this away from me. Just the image made me push into her more forcefully. The bottles and jars on the table were rattling and tipping over with the force of our movements, but I couldn't find it in myself to care. Gripping her hair, I pulled her up so her back was now against my chest, "Do you see him? Do you think he can make you feel this way?" I continued to thrust in and out of her, forcing her to look out the window.

I knew I was slipping. My walls were falling around me and right now I didn't care. I needed to fuck her hard enough that she would remember me tonight as she lay in bed. My free hand ran up her sides to her breast, cupping them and twisting her nipples roughly.

"Oh God," she moaned. "No, no one has ever made me feel like this." Just hearing her say those words filled me with an animalistic pride I'd never felt before. Sliding my hand down her side I placed it behind her knee and hitched it up to the table, opening her up wider and allowing my thrusts to deepen. She gasped at the sensation the position brought, and I kissed and nipped up and down her shoulders and neck.

"Do you feel how perfect you fit around me?" I groaned into her neck. "You feel so fucking good.

When you go downstairs, I want you to remember this. Remember what it felt like to have my cock pumping in and out of you." The sensation was becoming too overwhelming and I knew I was getting close. I was terrified that this would be the last time I'd feel this. I was beyond desperate. I craved her like a drug, and this feeling consumed my every waking thought. She began grinding her hips into me more roughly and I knew she was getting closer too. Taking her hand in mine, I laced our fingers and moved them down her body to her clit, both our hands stroking and teasing. Continuing to where we were connected, I

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groaned as I felt myself glide in and out of her. “Do you feel that?” I whispered into her ear as I spread our fingers so they slipped on either side of me.

She turned her head and moaned loudly into my neck. I knew enough about her in this way to know what was coming. She was tightening around my cock and her breaths were coming quicker. Each movement was bringing us each closer and I needed to keep her quiet. Removing my hand from her hair I gently covered her mouth and whispered that she needed to stay quiet into her ear. But just as her muffled screams filled the air I felt my own climax begin to rip through me. Her hand fell from my hair to cover my own mouth and I closed my eyes and let the wave overtake me. My final thrusts were deep and hard and I felt myself spill into her.

Slowly I opened my eyes; kissing her palm before removing it from my mouth and laying my forehead against her shoulder. The voices from below continued to carry up to us so I knew no one was aware of what had just happened. She leaned back into me and we stood there quietly for a few moments.

Slowly she began to pull away from me; and I frowned slightly at the loss of contact. I watched as she straightened her skirt, retrieved her bra and attempted to retie the straps of her top. As I reached down to pull up my pants, my eyes were caught by the torn lacy fabric on the floor; reaching over to grab them I quickly put them in my pants pocket as I refastened them. I glanced over to her to see her still struggling with her dress; moving over to her and brushing her hands away; I retied them for her without meeting her gaze.

BOOK EXCLUSIVE

We glanced at each other once in an uncomfortable silence as I removed my hands from the straps and stepped back from her. I didn’t even know if either of us were surprised it had happened again.

At this point it felt as if it was becoming almost an undeniable force. We both took shaky, steadying breaths and looked away from the each other before walking to the door. I reached for the doorknob and pulled it open, and we both stopped short at the sight before us.

There standing outside the doorway, with her arms folded and her eyebrow raised knowingly, was Rosalie, her eyes flickering between us.

“I think the three of us need to have a little talk.”

EIGHT – Between the Lines

The moment Mr. Ryan opened the door and we came face to face with Rosalie, I froze. I could feel the tension radiating from him as she stood in front of us with her arms folded and eyebrow raised.

"Well isn't this cozy? What exactly were you two doing in there?" she asked suspiciously, her eyes moving between the two of us. I ran over in my head everything she could have heard and I felt the heat spreading over my skin.

I chanced a look over to Mr. Ryan as he did the same, and then turned back to Rosalie and shook my head. "Nothing, Mr. Ryan and I just had something to discuss. That's all." I tried to play it off, but my nervous laughter gave me away.

Rosalie shook her head but her eyes remained more on him than on me. "I heard noise in there but it certainly wasn't talking," she said in a firm tone and then shrugged. "And even if I didn't know you both so well, it's no secret that you two don't *talk* about anything; you yell. So, what? Are you two dating?"

"No, of course not!" Mr. Ryan and I exclaimed at the same time, our eyes meeting for a brief moment afterward and just as quickly looking away.

"So… you're just fucking then," she continued in sharp statement rather than a question, and it seemed that neither of us could find the words to reply. The tension in that hallway was so palpable, there was no way it went unnoticed by her. "For how long?"

"Rose…" he began, shaking his head and for once I actually felt bad about his discomfort. I had never seen him look intimidated before.

"How long, Bennett? Chloe?" she persisted but again, neither of us answered and she shook her head.

"You two need to fix this shit *now*."

"Rose, I… we just…" Just what? How could I explain any of this? We just had amazing sex? We were like magnets, drawn together and unable to resist the pull? We just….

"We just made a mistake, Rose. It was a mistake." His voice cut through my thoughts and I looked over to him in shock.

My eyes never left him as she began to speak. "Mistake or not, it needs to stop *now*. What if I had been Esme? And Bennett, you're her boss! Have you forgotten that?" She continued to look at him, a disappointed frown upon her

face. “Look, you two are adults, and I don’t know what’s going on here; but what ever you do, *do not* let Daddy Carlisle find out.”

I tensed slightly at the thought of Carlisle ever finding out about this, and the disappointment he would feel if this ever came to light. I couldn’t bear that. I didn’t want them to think of me this way. I knew we shouldn’t be doing this, that it was probably a mistake. But we’d never uttered those words, and I hated to admit that hearing them hurt. This needed to stop. “That won’t be a problem,” I replied in a tight angry voice, shooting daggers at him with my eyes. “I intend to learn from my mistake.

Excuse me.”

I moved past them toward the stairs, the anger and hurt I felt at his words causing a searing ache in my chest. Why should I have expected anything different from him? For a moment I thought I saw a hint of compassion; a vulnerability I had never witnessed before. But as quickly as it came, it was gone, and every reason I had for despising him became clear again. I swear to God, if I didn’t think it would tip anyone off, I’d suggest his family have him checked for some kind of personality disorder.

Before stepping outside, I composed myself and took my seat again beside Mike. “Everything alright?” he asked with a gentle smile.

I turned my head toward him and really took him in for a moment. He was very attractive; neatly combed blond hair, a kind face, and the most beautiful blue eyes I had ever seen in my life. He was everything I *should* be wanting. My gaze shot up a moment later to Mr. Ryan returning to the table with Rosalie, but I quickly looked away from him and smiled softly at Mike. “Yea, I just… I’m not feeling too well. I think I might actually need to call it a night.”

As I stood to gently kiss Esme’s cheek, Mike stood behind me. “Here I’ll walk you to your car,” he said in a concerned voice, and once I finished my good nights, I felt his hand on the small of my back as we walked back into the house. Once in the driveway beside my car, he gave me a shy smile and took my hand. “It was really nice meeting you, Chloe. And I would like to call you sometime and maybe have that lunch.”

I returned a smile to him and released my hand from his. “Let me see your phone.” I bit my lip as he pulled it out of his pocket and handed it to me. Part of me felt very wrong for doing this; having just been with one man upstairs not even twenty minutes ago, and now giving my phone number to another. But it was time to move past this sick twisted game between myself and Mr. Ryan; and a lunch date with a nice guy seemed like a good place to start. He smiled more

broadly as I handed his phone back and then handed me a card with his number on it. I chuckled softly at the old-fashioned nature of such a gesture, and I slid it inside my wallet. His hand grasped mine again, and he lifted it up to his lips. “I’ll call you Monday; hopefully your flowers aren’t completely wilted.”

I shrugged slightly and chuckled. “It’s the thought that counts. Thank you,” I said softly as he brushed a stray windblown hair from my cheek. Such a gentle and tender gesture that it should have made my heart melt. But instead it made me tense; worried he might try to kiss me next. “I should go.”

Mike nodded, opening my car door for me and smiling. “Of course. Drive carefully, and goodnight, Chloe”

I paused to look at him and smiled. “Goodnight, Mike.” He closed my door and I started the engine, my jaw tightening and I revved the engine once, before peeling out of the driveway and watched him disappear from my rear view mirror.

I thrust my head back against the headrest and my hands tightly gripped the steering wheel. “Stupid, stupid, stupid,” I chanted to myself. How could I have allowed myself to do this again; to let him take such control of my mind and body? Why wasn’t a nice guy like Mike enough to make me say no?

When I arrived home, I practically sprinted to my bathroom to quickly shower and change, removing all physical traces of tonight. I slid on a tank top and a pair of boy shorts and climbed into bed, willing myself to fall asleep, even if only for a few hours. Eventually my eyes did close, and I prayed for the respite from this nightmare only sleep could bring me.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

I was alone, I was almost sure of that. He had placed me in the leather restraints and covered my eyes without a single word. Only his eyes had told me what he wanted… me. I wasn’t sure if I should be scared or not, laying on my back with no chance of escape. A smart woman would be, but all I felt was alive.

My mind was battling with my body, telling me this was wrong. Telling me I didn’t want this. But I did… more than anything.

Before leaving me, he had lightly run his fingertips from the scarf across my eyes, down my neck to my nipple; tracing feather like circles around the hardened bud. A moan escaped my lips as I reflexively arched my back into his touch, my hands pulling against the restraints.

With one last sweep of his hand, he brushed his long finger tips down my abdomen to the ache between my legs. I wanted him to press into me, to fill me and stop the ceaseless yearning he brought forth. But with one small circle

around my clit, he withdrew his hand and was gone.

The minutes ticked by, the anticipation of what was to come growing greater with each passing second.

What would he do to me? God the things I wanted him to do. Every nerve in my body was alight with the anticipation.

Each wrist was bound above my head by a smooth leather cuff, and my legs were restrained at each ankle; leaving me open and exposed. I should feel embarrassed. I should feel ashamed. But I couldn't even find it in myself to care. I'd never felt so wanton, so ready to just be taken.

Hearing a sound to my right, I quickly turned my head, straining to make out the noise. Was someone there? A tremor ran through me at the thought of someone seeing me like this. There it was again. Was he in here? Was he watching me? My chest was heaving, my skin covered in goose bumps, and my muscles were so tensed that it felt as if my entire body was vibrating.

Needing to do something, I pulled uselessly again at the leather restraints. If you would have asked me about this a few months ago, I would have said that even imagining a situation like this would make me panic. But now, all I felt was relief. A strange, powerful sense of relief at being able to give up control of my own actions; to let someone else take charge of pleasuring me. It was the most erotic thing I'd ever experienced. But it wasn't just anyone I wanted. It was him. I continued to struggle until a smooth voice sounded through the silent room.

"Mmmm. So beautiful." He spoke quietly from somewhere across the room. My breath caught and I turned my head searching for him.

"Seeing you like this; stripped and bare, open for me, completely vulnerable; it's the most beautiful thing in the world." His voice was closer to me now and I imagined he had to be standing near my feet, watching me. The thought alone was enough to send a visible shiver through my body.

I heard something that sounded like metal followed by a whooshing sound. His belt? Something cool and smooth ran up my calf, causing me to jerk my leg and gasp.

"Don't misunderstand me," he said softly, still continuing up my body, "It's not that I don't love your fire.

But there's something about you being totally defenseless; knowing I can do whatever I want to you…knowing that I can make you do anything I want to me." I felt his breath on my skin as he leaned over and whispered into my ear. "It makes me harder than you can imagine. Would you like to feel?"

EBOOKEXPERT

I felt the air leave my lungs, and my nipples hardened to the point of pain. Too proud to say the words, I bit my lip roughly and nodded yes in reply.

"Oh, I'm sure you would, my little tease. But you've been a very bad girl. Do you enjoy making me suffer?"

He pulled away from me and I felt something leather slide up my legs and across my pussy. I hissed at the sensation of something finally touching me where I wanted. I was so aroused I would have done anything he asked of me.

"Walking around in your sexy little outfits. You like making me hard don't you?" The cool leather brushed around one of my nipples. I felt it flick against my skin roughly and I was surprised at the moan that escaped my lips. What was happening to me? The sting of something slapping against my thigh brought me out of my thoughts and caused me to cry out. The sensation was amazing. It hurt a little, but there was pleasure too; I wanted him to do it again.

"Answer me," he said roughly, his mouth once again near my ear. I was so wrapped in this feeling, I couldn't even remember what he asked. I felt my hair being pulled and wrapped around his fist; he jerked it roughly and spoke again. "I said answer me," he growled.

"Yes sir," I whispered between gasps of air. I could feel myself slick and wanting, desperately wishing I could rub my legs together to ease some of the ache.

"And you deserve to be punished for that, don't you?" His nose skimmed my jaw, his hot breath tickling my neck. I pulled against the cuffs at my wrist, wanting to reach out and draw him to me.

"Yes sir," I whispered again. "Please punish me." I couldn't believe the words that were coming out of my mouth. This was so out of character for me, and yet I'd never felt freer.

He released my hair and pulled away. The sound of a zipper caught my attention and I turned my head, straining to decipher more. I assumed he was taking off the rest of his clothing and let myself imagine the sight of him standing there naked. Just the memory of his body caused my hips to rise slightly. The ache between my legs was becoming so uncomfortable that I would do anything to soothe it.

Strong hands moved along my ankles, adjusting the cuffs. Sliding his hands up my body he did the same with the bonds on my wrists. I felt him grip me under my arms and easily slide me up the table, leaving my head suspended over the edge. I was still bound and blindfolded as his fingertips ran along my breasts,

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cupping them and running a thumb over each nipple before sliding up along my neck to my hair.

Something warm and smooth brushed against my lower lip, and I gasped in surprise at the strange sensation. My lips parted instinctively and I pressed closer. "Open, my little tease," he said huskily. I groaned at the realization that it was the tip of his cock running back and forth along my lips. He was standing at the head of the table, and I eagerly opened my mouth, the angle allowing me to easily take him inside. I'd never been one to get off on giving head, but the feeling of pleasuring him this way was so erotic I moaned loudly around him.

"Fuck, you look so pretty with your mouth full." He slowly began to rock his hips; one hand cradling my face and the other running up and down my body. "God, you feel so good. You like that don't you, my little cocktease?" I moaned in response and took him deeper into my mouth, earning a deep groan from him. I'd never felt this overwhelming need to please a man before, but it was as if in this moment, my only purpose was to bring him pleasure. Leaning over me, his hand slid down between my breasts and to my clit. I couldn't suppress a deep groan as his fingers circled and teased.

"I love fucking your beautiful mouth," he grunted deeply as he continued with his ministrations and thrusting into my mouth. "Maybe I should keep you tied up here and hide you away from every other man. I don't share what's mine. Do you understand?" His voice was becoming strained and I nodded as best I could; sucking him harder in response. "Oh fuck, I'm…fuck I'm gonna come. Do you want that my little tease? Fuck…. Do you want me to come in that pretty little mouth?" I whimpered at his words, wanting nothing more than to bring him to release. My body was aching and trembling, every muscle straining and pulling to break free. His hands moved to my hair and he began to gasp and swear under his breath, and with one last push he shuddered and came in my mouth. I swallowed and continued to suck, relishing in his orgasm almost as much as he did.

Pulling himself from my mouth, he shifted around and then lay his head between my breasts; trying to calm his breathing. "So fucking good," he panted against my skin and began running his soft lips and tongue across my left breast. I moaned and tried to arch myself into his awaiting mouth, but was held in place, still bound to the table. Standing, he began readjusting the leather cuffs. Holding my head gently, he slid my body down so I was once again lying fully on the leather table. Strong hands ran up and down my limbs, rubbing and soothing, allowing my circulation to return to normal.

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Cradling my head, he kissed the sides of my face and whispered into my ear, "You've pleased me so much." My body sang with the knowledge and I turned my cheek into his touch. "How should I reward you?" he whispered seductively, all the while kissing up and down my neck. "Tell me. How do you want me to pleasure you? With my mouth?" He drew his tongue across one of my nipples, taking it between his teeth and tugging. "With my hands?" Long fingers traced down my abdomen and then moved below to dip inside me. A long desperate moan erupted from me, as I writhed and struggled, aching for more.

"Or with my cock?" Just the thought of him fucking me like this was enough to cause me to spasm around his fingers. "Ahh. That's what you want isn't it? Beg me. Tell me you want my cock in you." He added another finger and kissed up my thigh.

"Yes," I begged, struggling uselessly to free myself. "Please I want your cock inside me. Oh God Please. I'll do anything." I'd never felt so consumed by lust and need as I was this moment. Every word was true, I would do anything. I wanted him to claim my body, to calm this insatiable need I had for him.

Withdrawing his fingers, I felt him climb onto the table and settle between my thighs. Wetness touched my lip and he drew his finger back and forth.

"Do feel how ready you are?" My tongue flicked out and I licked my lip; tasting myself there. I wasn't even shocked to find that I enjoyed it. This man made me want to do things I'd never dreamed; to give up all my preconceived notions about how women were supposed to behave and give myself over to this magnetic force I felt when I was with him.

Leaning in closer to me, his chest brushing against my sensitive nipples; he placed a kiss on each of my covered eyes. "Tell me who you belong to," he whispered, brushing his lips against my cheeks, my forehead and finally my lips. His hand came up and released the scarf over my eyes, "I want to see your eyes when you tell me that you're mine. Who do you belong to?" I blinked several times, my sight adjusting to the dim light. The tip of his erection pressed against my clit causing the most delicious sensations to run up my body.

"You," I moaned, my eyes finally seeing his perfect face. "I belong to you."

"Mine," he breathed, as he thrust himself inside me. My eyes rolled back into my head at the sensation of him stretching and filling me. The world around us disappeared as he began moving; pulling almost completely out before driving forcefully back in. The force used caused the leather straps to pull almost painfully as his body pushed me further up the table. But it only added to the feeling.

PROOF ONLY

As his pace increased, he pinched my nipples and bit the tender flesh up and down my neck. I was overwhelmed by the sweet mixture of pleasure and pain I never expected; the animalistic way he drove into me, the possessive words he whispered against my skin, and the pleasure of his cock deep inside me.

I never dreamed being so helpless could feel so beautiful. His grunts were becoming louder and the need inside me began to grow. With each thrust I felt my hold on reality slipping.

"You belong to me," he panted and growled, lifting off me slightly to deepen his thrusts. "No one will ever touch you like this. You're mine, Chloe."

"Yes, only yours." I couldn't hold on much longer. "Take me!" I screamed, forgoing all internal restraint.

"Fuck me… please.. make me yours." My orgasm exploded inside me, and I was unashamed at the cries that filled the room. Stiffening above me, his face contorted in pleasure, and his cries joined mine as he came.

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Bolting up in bed, my eyes flew open and I looked around wildly. Where was I? Confused, I ran my hand over my chest, surprised to feel the soft cotton of my tank top. My throat was dry, and my heart raced as I fought to control my rapid breathing. Reaching over, I turned on my bedside lamp with shaking hands and took in the room around me. I was home, not in some strange room tied to a table.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

My bed was a tangled mess of blankets and I groaned as I saw the time on my alarm clock, 4:30.

Great.

I tried to focus on what had just happened. What the hell was that? I'd had more sex dreams about him than I could count, but nothing could compare to that.

Realizing that I would never get back to sleep, and not wanting to lay there and dwell on this, I decided to just get up. My body was sticky with sweat and I still felt that knot of arousal in my stomach. So I headed into the bathroom to take a shower.

But even as I cleansed my body, I could not cleanse my thoughts. The way he made my body feel. The sheer fact that I *enjoyed* it. I begged for him, had wanted him inside me so badly. Not all too different from what actually happened last night. I had tried weakly to fight it in reality, but in the dream I
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welcomed it; I relished it. *We just made a mistake*. His words from the night before still rattled around inside my head. And that coupled with my dream only strengthened my determination to fight this, to end this despicable addiction to the things he did to my body.

At least I had my yoga class with Alice this morning. I could lose myself in the movements, and not spare him even a single thought. It was just a matter of getting there.

However once I arrived, I realized I would have no such luck. To say I was distracted was an understatement. No matter what I did to divert my thoughts, they always ended up in one of two places: that fucking bathroom or that fucking dream. God, I'd spent so much time replaying both scenes in my head that I was having a hard time differentiating between the reality and the fantasy.

And honestly, I wasn't sure which one horrified me more; the things I'd actually let him do to me or the things I imagined. There was absolutely no doubt in my mind that given the opportunity he could make every aspect of that dream a reality. And it occurred to me for the first time, that he had called me Chloe. Such a small thing, but I had never heard him say it. It stirred a strange, unfamiliar feeling inside of me. One that I wasn't sure I liked. Taking a deep breath and closing my eyes, I cursed that beautiful face and body of his for the hundredth time that morning.

EBOOK ECLIPSE

The instructor's voice broke me from my thoughts as he guided us through our next pose. Looking over at Alice, I considered again the thought of spilling my guts. I had come to the conclusion that I really needed to talk about this to someone. There was Angela, but she worked for Emmett and couldn't keep a secret if her life depended on it. She was definitely out of the question. I knew Rose would talk to me if I asked, but there was just something about her being a Ryan and knowing what she had heard that left me feeling less than comfortable with that thought.

These were the times I really wished my mom were still alive. Just thinking about her brought a wrenching pain to my chest and tears to my eyes. Moving out here to spend the last years of her life with her had been the best decision I'd ever made. And even though living so far from my dad and friends was tough at times, I knew everything happened for a reason. I just wished the reason would hurry up and make itself known.

Could I tell all this to Alice? I had to admit that I was terrified of what she would think of me. But more than that, I was terrified of saying the words to someone out loud. Glancing in her direction once again I was now met with

Alice's bewildered gaze. "Okay, what's going on here?" She asked worried.

I tried to tell her nothing, I tried to brush it off and tell her she was being absurd. But I couldn't. The weight and the pressure of the last few weeks came crashing down on me and before I could control it, my chin started to tremble and I began rambling incoherently and bawling like a baby. "That's what I thought. Come on." Offering me her hand she helped me up and, gathering our belongings on the way, lead me out the door.

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Twenty minutes, two Mimosas, and one emotional breakdown later; I was sitting across from Alice's shocked expression at a table in our favorite restaurant. I told her everything; the panty ripping, my liking the panty ripping, the various locations, Rosalie catching us, my guilt over feeling like I was betraying Carlisle and Esme, Mike, Mr. Ryan's caveman declarations, and finally ending with my dream. When I looked up to meet her gaze, I winced; she looked like she just watched a car wreck. If it sounded that bad to me, I could only imaging what it would sound like to someone else.

"Okay, let me make sure I've got this straight." I nodded waiting for her to continue. "You're fucking your boss." I cringed slightly at the connotation. "The same boss you so lovingly refer to as 'Beautiful Bastard." I sighed heavily and nodded again. "But you hate him."

"Correct," I concurred, my eyes shifting away from her.

"You don't want to be with him, but you can't stay away," she added, a look of sheer confusion on her face.

"God, it sounds even worse to hear someone else say it," I groaned as I buried my face into my hands.

"But it's good," she said with a touch of humor in her voice.

"Good doesn't even come close to describing it, Alice. Phenomenal, intense, mind-blowing, multiple orgasmingly amazing doesn't come close to describing it." I couldn't even look at her at this point.

"Is 'orgasmingly' even a word?" Alice asked with a soft chuckle.

I rubbed my face roughly with my hands and sighed again. "I don't know. *I don't know!* But that's a bit of a moot point here, Alice."

"True. Well," she replied thoughtfully, clearing her throat. "I guess a small penis isn't his problem after all."

I groaned and let my head fall to my arms on the table. "No. No it most

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE
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definitely isn't." I looked up slightly at the sound of her muffled laughter from across the table. "Alice! This is not funny!" I protested.

"I'm sorry Chloe," she said, trying to reign herself in. "But even you have to see how insane this is. I mean of all the people I've ever known, you're the last person I would have ever imagined ending up in this situation. You've always been so serious, with each and every step of your life so planned out.

You've only been with three guys in your entire life, *all* of whom you were in relationships with. This man must really be something else." I frowned at her, knowing that her words bothered me so much because I new exactly how true they were.

"And this dream, it really freaked you out didn't it?" She asked, concern ringing in her voice.

"Oh that would be an understatement. I mean Alice, I was tied to a table and blindfolded. Helpless and vulnerable. *That's not me,* " I said louder than necessary. "And I loved it; I was *begging* for it, I've never even fantasized about something like that."

"You know," she began. "I bet that dream means something. Let's look it up." Pulling out her blackberry she fumbled with it a few minutes before laughing.

"What is it?" I asked, afraid to know the answer.

"Oh you're going to love this, 'To dream of being held in bondage represents aspects of your emotions and/or character are too tightly controlled or that are repressed. You may be restricting your need for self-expression or feel that you are a prisoner of your circumstances.' Well if that isn't you to a tee, I don't know what is," she giggled.

"Great," I sighed. "Alice, I know there's nothing wrong with having a purely sexual relationship with someone. I can handle that. And I know that I can at times be overly controlled, but it's the fact that I feel I have no control over myself when I'm with him. I mean, I don't even like him, and yet…I can't stay away."

Alice took a sip of her Mimosa, I could see the wheels working as she digested all I'd said and formed her thoughts. "Well, you know the answer, don't you?" she replied seriously and I looked up to her expectantly. "You have to stop this. Avoid being alone with him at all costs."

"Alice, it's not that simple," I retorted, shaking my head and beginning to ramble. "I *work* with him, *for* him. It's not as if *all* instances of being alone with him are easily avoidable. And on top of that, I have a conference to attend with

him in two weeks in Seattle. Same hotel, same general vicinity at all times."

"Chloe, what has gotten into you?" Alice asked an astonished tone as her eyes wandered over my face.

"I mean do you *want* this to continue?"

"No!" I exclaimed defensively as my eyes shot up to her skeptical gaze, and I quickly averted them. "I mean… I have never had anyone affect me this way. He makes me want things I never have before. I just wish it was someone else, someone nice, like Mike for instance."

"Like what? Like giving you a good spanking?" Alice responded with a chuckle, but when I bit my lip and looked away I heard her gasp. "Oh my god, he's spanked you?!"

My wide eyes shot back to her. "A little louder, Alice. I don't think the guy way in the back heard you,"

I hissed and then shook my head. As soon as I was sure no one was looking, I smoothed loose tendrils of hair back from my forehead. "Look, I know I need to stop this but I…"

I paused as I felt a prickling on the back of my neck as the hairs there stood on end and I felt goose bumps rise on my skin. I instinctively turned my head and felt my breath halt in my throat as I looked to the door. There he stood; dressed down in a black t-shirt and jeans, sneakers and hair in even sexier disarray than usual. I turned back around to face Alice, feeling all the blood drain from my face.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

"Chloe, what's wrong? You look like you've just seen a ghost," Alice asked in a concerned tone, reaching across the table to touch my arm.

I swallowed hard in an attempt to find my voice, and then brought my gaze to hers. "Alice, do you see that tall, good-looking man dressed in black right at the door?" I whispered and she raised her head slightly to look and I kicked her lightly under the table. "Don't make yourself obvious! *That* is my boss."

Alice's eyes widened and her jaw dropped slightly. "Oh my god," she gasped in a whisper and shook her head as her eyes moved up and down; obviously looking him over. "You weren't kidding, Chloe.

That is one *beautiful* bastard. I wouldn't kick him out of *my* bed . "

"Alice! You are really not being helpful here!" I exclaimed in a hushed tone.

"Who's the blonde?" she asked with a nod of her head toward them and I turned to look, seeing him being led to a table with a tall leggy blonde, his hand

on the small of her back until he held her chair for her as she sat down.

“What a pretentious prick,” I scoffed, shaking my head as I looked back to my own table. Just as she was about to respond, Alice’s phone rang and she reached for it in her purse. The ‘hey baby!’ greeting told me it was Jasper, and this would take a while. I turned again to look at Mr. Ryan, talking and laughing with the blonde; and I couldn’t tear my eyes away. He was even more attractive in a relaxed setting; smiling, his eyes dancing when he laughed. *Real smooth, Ryan*. As if he heard my thoughts, he turned his head toward me and our eyes locked. I clenched my jaw and turned away, tossing my napkin on the table. I had to get out of here. “I’ll be right back, Alice.”

She nodded and waved absentmindedly, never stalling her conversation. Standing up, I quickly made my way past his table making sure to avoid his eyes. I had just turned the corner and spotted the safety of the ladies room door when I felt a strong hand on my forearm. “Wait.” Just the sound of his voice sent a jolt through me. *Okay Chloe, you can do this. Just turn around and look at him and tell him to fuck off. He’s an asshole who called you a mistake last night and shows up with some blonde chick today.*

Straightening my shoulders, I turned to face him. *Shit.* He looked even better up close. I’d never seen him looking anything other than perfectly groomed; but he obviously hadn’t shaved this morning and rather than make him appear unkempt, it only made him sexier. I had to bite my lip to keep myself groaning at the thought of that stubble between my legs. *What the fuck was wrong with me?*

“What the hell do you want?” I spat at him, pulling my arm free from his grasp. Looking up at his face, I could see faint circles under his eyes. He looked tired. Well, good. If his nights were half as bad as mine, I was happy.

Running his hands through his hair, he looked around uncomfortably. “I just wanted to talk to you. To explain about last night.”

“What is there to explain? You’re obviously over it,” I said nodding my head towards the dining room and the blonde still sitting at his table. “That was quick, even for you.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” He quipped, looking back at me. “Are you talking about Tasha?”

“Oh is that her name? Well you and Tasha have a lovely meal, Mr. Ryan.” I turned to leave but was once again stopped. “Fuck! Will you just let me go?”

“Why do you have to be such a bitch all the time? And why would you even care?” Our argument had begun to attract attention from the staff passing

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through the kitchen. So after a quick glance around, he pulled me into the ladies room and locked the door.

“What do you think you’re doing? And what do you mean, why would I care? You fucked me less than 24 hours ago, and yet here you sit with someone else!” I all but shouted at him. I was so angry my nails were practically cutting into the palms of my hands.

“You think I’m here on a date? Holy shit,” he exhaled heavily, shaking his head, “This is fucking unbelievable. Tasha is an old friend. She happens to run a charitable organization that Ryan Inc. contributes to. I was supposed to meet her Monday to sign some papers but she had a last minute flight change and is leaving the country this afternoon.” He ran his hands through his hair again absentmindedly. “I haven’t been with anyone else since the wi-,” he paused to rethink his words, “Since we first… you know…” Was he serious?

We stood there staring at each other as I tried to let his words seep in. He hadn’t been with anyone else. Was that even possible? I knew he was a womanizer. I’d seen him with women in his office several times. Not to mention the stories I’d heard around the building. And even if all that was true, it didn’t change the fact that he was my boss and this whole thing was wrong. “You *really* expect me to believe that? All those women throwing themselves at you and you haven’t even snagged *one*?!

Aww, I’m touched,” I sneered sarcastically and turned for the door.

“It’s not *that* difficult to believe,” he growled angrily and I could feel his eyes burning into my back.

“Oh yes that’s right, because you are *such* a one woman man, aren’t you? Give me one reason why I *should* believe you. You can’t, not that I care,” I snapped over my shoulder and reached for the doorknob. “You know what, it doesn’t even matter. It was just a *mistake*, right?”

“Look, that’s what I wanted to talk to you about.” He moved closer and his scent washed over me, bringing me back to my dream. I suddenly felt panicked, like there wasn’t enough oxygen in the tiny room. I needed to get out of here, now. What had Alice said less than five minutes ago? Don’t be alone with him? Good advice. I happened to like this particular pair of panties and didn’t really want to see them end up in his pocket. Okay, that was a lie…wasn’t it?

“Look, whatever. I need to go.” A strange sense of déja-vu was beginning to set in and I knew what would happen if I stayed in here.

“Are you seeing Mike again?” He asked from behind me. My hand was on the

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knob; all I had to do was turn it and I was safe. I froze, staring at that damn knob for what seemed like minutes, battling with myself. It would be so easy to stay.

My eyes closed and my nipples hardened with the thought. *Get out of here, Chloe*. “What’s it to you?”

Goose bumps spread across my skin. I was so stupid. I heard as much as felt him move closer to me.

“I thought we covered this last night,” he said, his breath warm against my hair.

“Yeah, a lot of things were said last night.” His fingertips moved up my arm and slipped the thin strap of my tank top off my shoulder; his lips lightly brushing over my skin.

“I didn’t mean it,” he whispered against my skin.

“That doesn’t mean it’s not true.” My body instinctively leaned into him, my head tilting slightly allowing him easier access.

“I shouldn’t have said it.” Moving my ponytail over my shoulder, his soft lips moved across my back.

My breaths were deep and every nerve in my body was responding to him. Why couldn’t I leave?

“Turn around.” His words were so simple, and yet they sparked such conflict inside my head. It was one thing for him to press me against a wall or forcefully grab me, but now the choice was mine.

Biting my lip hard, I tried to bring myself to turn the handle. My hand actually twitched, before it fell to my side in defeat.

Turning slowly, I looked up to meet his eyes. They were filled with lust and I actually felt my legs weaken at the intensity. His hand came up to grip my face, his thumb brushing across my bottom lip.

Our gazes locked, our quickened breaths sounding around us, and when I thought I couldn’t wait one more second he pulled me to him, crashing his lips to mine.

The moment we kissed, my body gave up fighting and I couldn’t get close enough. My purse landed on the tile floor and my hands dove into his hair pulling him to me. Our kisses were frenzied and teasing, our hands searching for skin. He backed me into the wall and ran his hands down to my ass, lifting me slightly. I gasped as I felt his erection press against me. His hands slid into my yoga pants and cupped my ass over my panties.

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“Fuck. What are you wearing?” He groaned into my neck, his palms sliding back and forth over the pink satin. I almost smiled as I remembered which pair I was wearing. They had a heart cutout across the bum lined in lace; they were brand new and they were expensive. Lifting me fully I wrapped my legs around his waist and he pressed me farther into the wall, grounding his hardened cock against me. He moaned as I took his earlobe between my teeth.

Pulling one side of my tank top down, he took one of my nipples into his mouth. My head fell back and hit the wall as I felt the scruff of his unshaven face against my breasts. A shrill sound broke through my haze and I heard him swear. My phone. Placing me on my feet, he stepped away from me, his face already back in its usual scowl. I quickly rearranged my clothing and reached for my purse.

Finding my phone I grimaced when I saw the picture displayed on the caller ID.

“Hello Alice,” I said breathlessly.

“Chloe, where the hell are you? And why is there a bored looking blonde sitting out here by herself?”

She questioned.

“I’ll be there in a second, okay?” I listened to her reply before closing my phone and stuffing it back into my bag; avoiding his eyes.

“Look, I-” He was cut off as my phone rang again.

“God Alice! I said I’ll be there in a minute!” I yelled, my voice echoing off the walls. But it wasn’t Alice.

“Chloe?” Mike’s confused voice sounded through the phone.

“Oh…hi.” Shit. This could not be happening to me. “Look, I can’t really talk right now.”

“Yeah, I’m sorry to bother you on a Sunday, but I just couldn’t stop thinking about you. And I don’t want to get anyone in trouble or anything, but right after you left I checked my email and there was a conformation for delivery of your flowers.”

“Really?” I asked, feigning interest. My gaze was locked with his; nostrils flaring and jaw clenched, obviously trying to decipher who I was talking to.

“Well it seems they were signed for by Bennett Ryan.”

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

NINE – Lessons Learned

I was an ass. There was just no other way to explain it. Standing there facing Rosalie, the words had just come out. *It was a mistake*. I could see Ms. Mills looking at me from the corner of my eye; and seeing the pain and shock on her face made me feel like I'd been punched in the stomach. I could only imagine how she felt. I had just shared one of the most intense and amazing sexual experiences of my life with this woman and I just referred to it as a mistake. God, even *I* wanted to kick my own ass.

"Mistake or not, it needs to stop *now*." Rosalie's words pulled me from my thoughts. "What if I would have been Esme? Bennett, you're her boss! Have you forgotten that?" Her statement only deepened the shame I felt over my behavior. *Was* I taking advantage of her? I thought back to our now numerous encounters, and was somewhat relieved to recall her being an absolutely active participant; but even that didn't ease my guilt. "Look, you two are adults, and I don't know what's going on here. But what ever you do, *do not* let Daddy Carlisle find out."

My father. In all that had occurred, I don't think I'd ever fully considered the consequences of him finding out. Not only would *I* be in deep shit, Ms. Mills would be devastated. I had seen for myself firsthand the relationship my parents had with her, and this kind of situation had the possibility to damage that beyond repair. My parents were good, kind people and I knew they would never be too harsh, but that didn't change the fact that they would be deeply disappointed…in both of us.

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I felt her tense beside me at the use of Rosalie's nickname for my dad. I knew she had to be having the same internal debate with herself that I was. But I still wasn't ready for her response when it came.

"That won't be a problem," she said, giving me a glare that actually made me recoil slightly. "I intend to learn from my mistake. Excuse me." Before I could even think of a way to stop her, she turned and walked down the stairs.

"Have you lost your mind, Bennett?" Rosalie unsuccessfully attempted to whisper to me. I turned quickly to her as her fist collided with my bicep.

"Rose!" I yelled, rubbing the sore spot on my arm and glaring at her. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

"How long has this been going on with you two? I get the feeling this wasn't a one time thing, for some reason."

I really didn't want to get into this, especially here. "Rose, I love you-but this is none of your business." Her eyes grew wide and her mouth fell open.

"None of my business?" she spat angrily. "Well, if you'd wanted to keep it between the two of you, you shouldn't have been fucking her in the bathroom while your entire family was right downstairs."

"I'm not discussing this any further with you," I said with an air of finality. "And I'm asking that you please keep this between us. I wouldn't want this to look bad for everyone involved." She continued to glare at me, but didn't respond. I decided that I'd been gone too long already and turned to leave, but was stopped by a hand on my forearm.

"You really are a bastard sometimes. You know that, right?" Without waiting for an answer, she brushed past me to return to the party. As she reached the first step, she turned to look at me. "And for God's sake, fix your hair."

I frowned but automatically raised my hand to my hair, combing it back with my fingers as I descended the stairs behind her.

As we stepped onto the patio, I was overwhelmed by an urge to strangle Mike. He sat leaning into her, a worried expression on his face, asking if she was alright. Was she? Before I'd even had a chance to sit down, she said she wasn't feeling well and excused herself for the night. I was just about to offer to walk her out when Mike stepped in. *Fucking Newton*. He really was making it easy for me to hate him.

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Using the excuse of an important phone call, I quietly followed the both of them and waited by the doorway. My chest filled with an animalistic rage as I watched them together, and the air left my lungs as I saw him hand her his phone. She entered something into it; she was going to see him again, even after what we just did. I swore under my breath as he moved closer and kissed her hand, tucking a piece of her hair behind her ear. The same ear I'd just kissed and whispered into. Mike stood and watched her leave before turning back towards the house. Our eyes met, and I swear I saw a challenge there. That was it. I had to make this right.

I slept like hell that night. I lay in my huge bed for hours, watching the city lights outside my window; the memories of this evening replaying over and over in my mind. My plan had blown up in my face, but I still couldn't regret the things that we'd done to each other. It was wrong, and complicated and twisted and fucked up, but that still didn't take away from the fact that it was amazing. I shook my head, thinking about how 'amazing' was an understatement. My balls tightened and my cock twitched at the mere thought of fucking her. It was

heaven and hell all wrapped up together, and the most intense thing I'd ever experienced. No matter how much I thought it over, I was at a complete loss as to how to deal with something, for the first time in my life.

The sun light began to permeate the city outside, reflecting off the chrome and glass buildings. I reluctantly gave up on sleep and headed to the shower; if I hurried I could fit in a run before meeting Tasha to sign the donation paperwork. I never did work on Sunday, but when she called late last night and explained her travel situation, I had agreed. In reality, all I wanted to do was go for a drive and get as far away from my problems as I could, but as usual, work had to come first. The rest would have to wait.

At 10:30, I met Tasha outside a little bistro downtown and we exchanged pleasantries. My family had known her family for years, and she ran one of the most influential charities for autistic children in the country. She was beautiful and intelligent, and although we were great friends, we were never interested in each other romantically. Holding the door open for her, I guided her to our table, making sure to pull out her chair. My mother raised me to be a gentleman, no matter how much I seemed to be ignoring that lately.

We had been joking about a mutual acquaintance of ours when I suddenly felt I was being watched. Looking up, my stomach dropped when I met the eyes of Ms. Mills. She looked away quickly, embarrassed that she had been caught staring, and spoke to her friend. When the other girl's phone rang, she excused herself and headed to the back of the restaurant. Before I even had a plan, I told Tasha I would be back. She nodded with a small chuckle and a wink, and I stood up to follow Ms. Mills across the room. God, she looked sexy. She was dressed for the weekend, wearing tight black yoga pants and a white tank top. Her hair was pulled into a pony tail, and as she walked ahead of me I couldn't help but watch her perfect ass, remembering the last time I had seen it on display.

Grabbing her arm, I forced her to look at me. I knew she would fight me; nothing between us was ever easy. Our emotions were always in a constant battle, never letting us coexist peacefully. It was just the way we were.

"What the hell do you want?" She looked absolutely livid, and I couldn't blame her. My behavior had been so…unfair and despicable. Doing and saying something one moment, and acting out the exact opposite the next. I had to make it right.

"I just wanted to talk to you about last night," I said, my fingers running nervously through my hair. If I looked half as nervous as I felt, I was in trouble. I knew the look she was giving me right now; she was contemplating ripping out

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my heart and feeding it to me.

“What is there to explain? You’re obviously over it,” she said, nodding towards my table. “That was quick, even for you.” What was she talking about? Then it dawned on me: Tasha. She thought I was on a date? I watched her for a brief moment, astounded. Was there a possibility she felt this insane, unhealthy obsession in return? I wanted to ask her why she would even care, but I needed to do that in private. Noticing a door ahead, I pulled her in and locked it behind me. It was only then that I realized where we were. *Oh, shit. .another bathroom*.

Before I could respond, she started in on me; she thought I was fucking other women. I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. I tried to explain about Tasha, that we were just old friends and that it was completely innocent. The rolling of her eyes told me she didn’t buy it. I cringed at the thought of what I was going to have to tell her. Why was I justifying myself to this woman, who was obviously going to turn around and do the exact same thing to me? Was she really this much of a hypocrite? I felt compelled to explain myself nonetheless. “I haven’t been with anyone else since the wi-,” I stopped. There was no way I could even utter that word. “Since we first… you know…”

“You *really* expect me to believe that? All those women throwing themselves at you and you haven’t even snagged *one*?! Awww, I’m touched,” she practically sneered at me.

“It’s not *that* difficult to believe,” I growled back. *This* was un-fucking-believable. What the hell had I done to warrant her not trusting me? I could admit to being a fucking asshole, but I’d never given her any reason to doubt my word. She was acting like a jealous… I had to stop and let that thought sink in for a moment. She was behaving almost as insane as I was.

She turned to leave, but stopped to glare at me over her shoulder. “Oh, right-because you are *such* a one-woman man, aren’t you? Give me one reason why I *should* believe you. You can’t, not that I care. You know what? It doesn’t even matter. It was just a *mistake*, right?”

A sickening feeling settled in my stomach. I knew those words had been hurtful, but I hadn’t understood exactly how badly I had hurt her. I couldn’t let her go.

“Look, that’s what I wanted to talk to you about,” I said as I stepped closer to her. I might have felt that way, but even I knew I shouldn’t have said it. She still tried to leave and I felt panicked, blurting out the first thing that came to mind. “Are you seeing Mike again?” But before I could take it back, I noticed her hand froze on the doorknob.

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“What’s it to you?” she asked quietly. She seemed to be struggling with the idea of leaving, and as usual I didn’t know what I wanted her to do. It was never a good idea for the two of us to be alone like this. Less than two minutes had elapsed since we started talking, and my traitorous body was already responding to her presence. Without thinking, I stepped towards her, pressing my body to her back.

“I thought we covered this last night,” I said. Goosebumps were forming on her skin and my body seemed to override my brain. I brushed the thin strap on her shoulder over and swept my lips softly against her skin, letting myself get lost in her delicate smell.

“Yeah, a lot of things were said last night,” she replied softly.

“I didn’t mean it,” I murmured against her skin.

“That doesn’t mean it’s not true.” Her head tipped slightly, allowing me to taste her neck.

“I shouldn’t have said it.” Moving her ponytail so I could kiss along her back, I heard her breath shutter. Her body responded just as insanely to me as mine did to her.

“Turn around,” I whispered against her hair, waiting for her response. It had to be her choice. My head wanted her to stop me, to slap me across the face and walk out. But my body had other ideas.

My selfish body wanted to kiss her and touch her; to make her mine. I watched her hand closely, waiting for her to leave, all the while silently praying that she would. When her hand fell to her side, my eyes closed in defeat. She wasn’t strong enough, either.

Turning slowly, she looked into my eyes; eyes that mirrored the same defeat I felt. I pulled her to me, my hand going to her hair. I tried to stop; tried to talk myself into leaving, but I couldn’t. We kissed, hands touching, teeth nipping, bodies close together. I needed more and pulled her up, connecting where we needed it most. Our moans blended together and our mouths searched for more, my hands slipping into her pants, lifting her to me and pressing her back against the wall. I could feel the soft silk and lace covering her ass, with the outline of a heart cut into the fabric. I groaned. “Fuck. What are you wearing?” I whispered into her neck. I lifted her further, and she answered by wrapping her legs around my waist.

Brushing my lips across her chest while I pulled her shirt down, I had just placed one perfect nipple in my mouth when I heard a phone ring nearby. *Of*

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course. Setting her on her feet, she straightened her top and reached into her discarded purse for her phone. I roughly ran my hands through my hair again, willing myself to keep from grabbing that phone and flushing it down the toilet.

It must have been her friend from the table. So that was Alice; fiancé to the great nickname-spiller. I cursed silently as she hung up. She was just putting her phone away when it rang again.

"God, Alice! I said I'll be there in a minute!" she yelled, but then her eyes dropped and several expressions passed over her face. Anger, embarrassment, annoyance and then…curiosity? Looking up at me, our eyes locked, the tension in the room building again. I could vaguely make out a man's voice on the other end and felt the caveman begin to awaken. Who the hell was calling her?

Suddenly her eyes narrowed, and a tiny voice inside told me that I should be nervous. "Well, thank you so much for letting me know. Yes. Yes, I will. Okay. Yes, I'll call you when I decide. Thanks for calling, Mike." Mike? *Fucking Newton*.

She ended the call and slowly put the phone back in her purse. Looking down, she shook her head slowly, a small laugh escaping her lips. That little voice inside me was getting louder. Looking up at me, a small, wicked smile graced her mouth. "Is there anything you'd like to tell me?" she asked sweetly, and for some reason it made me even more anxious. I racked my brain, but couldn't think of anything. *What was she talking about?*

"You see," she said continuing to shake her head. "That was the strangest conversation. It seems that when Mike checked his email this morning, he had a delivery confirmation for my flowers. You'll never guess what it said."

She moved one step towards me, and instinctively I moved one step back. I didn't like where this was going. "It turns out that someone signed for the flowers." *Oh shit*. "The name on the slip said Bennett Ryan." *Fuuuuuck*. Why the hell did I sign my own name? I tried to think of a response but my mind was suddenly blank. Obviously, my abrupt silence told her everything she needed to know.

"You son of a bitch! You signed for them and then lied to me?!" she yelled, with a violent shove on my chest, and I had a sudden instinct to protect my balls. "Why did you do that?" My back was now against the wall and I was searching for an alternative exit. Why hadn't I thought this plan through better?

"Answer me, damn it!"

I needed an answer and I needed it fast. Running my hands through my hair

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for the hundredth time in the last five minutes, I decided it was probably better to just come clean.

“I don’t know, okay?!” I shouted back. “I just….fuck!” Scrubbing my hands over my face, I began pacing across the floor. Looking up, I noticed that she’d taken out her phone and appeared to be texting someone. “What are you doing?” I asked.

“Not that it’s any of your business, but I’m telling Alice to just leave without me. I’m not leaving here until you tell me the truth.” She glared at me and I could feel the anger coming off of her in waves. I briefly considered telling Tasha what was going on, but knowing her, she’d figured it out by now.

“Well? I’m waiting, Ryan.” I met her eyes and let out a deep sigh. There was just no way I could explain myself and not sound like I’d lost my mind.

“Okay, I signed for them,” I replied in exasperation. She just stared at me, her jaw clenching and her fists balled so tightly that her knuckles were white.

“And…?” she said, her eyes never leaving mine.

“And…I threw the flowers away.” As I stood facing her, I realized that I deserved every bit of her anger. I was being unfair; I was offering her nothing, but still standing in the way of someone who could possibly offer her everything. It wasn’t fair and it wasn’t right, but I knew I couldn’t fight it. I was like a junkie. Being with her sexually was the most intense high I’d ever experienced. When we were apart, I found myself replaying each of our encounters, both hating it and wanting the chance to get another fix at the same time.

“You are fucking unbelievable,” she gritted through clenched teeth. I knew she was doing everything she could to keep from lunging across the room and pummeling me. “Why? Why would you do that?”

Here was the part I didn’t want to get into. “Because…” I bit my lip and scratched the back of my head, still trying to figure out the best way to answer this. I fucking hated that I’d let myself get into this situation. Letting out a long sigh, I just blurted it out. “Because I didn’t want you to go out with Mike, alright?!”

“Who in the hell do you think you are? Just because we’ve had sex does not mean you get to make decisions in my life. We aren’t a couple, we aren’t dating. Hell, we don’t even like each other!” she yelled.

“You think I don’t know that?! It doesn’t make any sense. But when I saw those flowers…come on, they were fucking roses for God’s sake!” I exclaimed without thinking, and she looked at me as if she were ready to have me

committed somewhere.

“Are you on some sort of medication? What the hell does the fact that they were roses have to do with anything?” Everybody in the entire restaurant could probably hear us. Thank God it was Sunday and the place was practically empty.

“Fuck! I don’t know! I just saw them and reacted. I didn’t stop and think about it. Just the thought of him touching you like…” My fists clenched and my voice trailed off as I tried to regain my composure.

I was getting angrier by the second; at myself for being weak and letting my emotions get out of hand, and at her for still having this fucking inexplicable hold on me.

“Look, I’m not saying I agree with you, but I understand what you did…to a point.” My eyes flew to her in shock. “I would be lying if I said I haven’t had similar…possessive feelings,” she said reluctantly. I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. Did she actually just admit to me that she felt this, too? “But that doesn’t change the fact that you lied to me. You lied right to my face. I might think you’re an arrogant asshole most of the time, but you’ve always been someone I trusted to be honest with me.” I flinched as her words hit me. She was right.

“I’m sorry.” My words hung in the air, and I wasn’t sure who was more surprised by them; her or me.

We stood across from each other, our gazes never wavering, neither of us knowing what to say.

“Prove it.” She looked at me so calmly, not an ounce of emotion visible in her features.

What did she mean? Then, it hit me. *Prove it*. We couldn’t speak through words, because words only led to trouble. This? This is what we were, and if she would give me this one chance to make up for what I’d done, I had to take it. I hated her so much in that moment. I hated that she was right and I was wrong, and I hated that she was forcing me to make a choice. I hated how much I wanted her most of all.

I closed the distance between us, wrapping my hand around the back of her neck. I pulled her to me roughly, meeting her gaze as I drew her mouth to mine. There was an unspoken challenge there.

Neither of us would back down or admit that this…whatever this was… was beyond our control.

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The moment our lips touched, I was taken over by a familiar buzz coursing through my body. Her hands remained at her sides, allowing me to lead the kiss; as my tongue met hers, she moaned into my mouth.

My hands fisted deeply into her hair, forcing her to bend to my kiss. This might be for her, but I was damn sure going to control it. Pressing my body to hers, I groaned at the flawless way each of her curves fit against me. I wanted this need to go away, to be satisfied and move on; but each time I felt her, it was better than I remembered.

Falling to my knees, I grasped her hips and pulled her closer, my lips moving across the waist of her pants. Lifting her shirt up, I kissed each inch of visible skin, enjoying the tensing of her muscles as I explored. Hooking my fingers into the waist of her pants I looked up at her. Her eyes were closed and she was biting on her lower lip. I felt my cock twitch at the sheer thought of what I was about to do.

I pulled her pants down her thighs; goose bumps breaking out over her skin as I trailed my fingers down her legs. Turning her slightly, I finally got a chance to see the panties I had been imagining. Pink satin; a small heart cut out across her ass. Pink lace lined the heart, but still left enough skin visible to send a surge of arousal straight through me. Her hands went to my hair and pulled roughly. I fucking loved it when she did that. I bit my lip and groaned as I looked up at her. My fingers ran along the edge of the delicate satin, stopping at the thin straps on her hips. “These are almost too pretty to ruin,” I said, wrapping one strap around each hand. “Almost.” With a quick tug they broke easily; allowing me to pull the pink material between her legs slowly and stuff it in my pocket.

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A sense of urgency took me over then. I quickly freed one of her legs and placed it over my shoulder.

As my lips met her sensitive skin, her fingers gripped my hair tightly and moved her hips against my mouth. I realized that she was as helpless against this as I was, and the intensity of that knowledge almost overwhelmed me. She was warm and wet against my lips and I savored every moment, taste, and sound as my tongue teased her heated flesh. I wanted to memorize every moan and plea that escaped her mouth and know that I was the reason for it. The feeling was so vivid that I moaned against her, causing her to cry out as she twisted her body closer. “Oh god, Ryan,” she whispered breathily as her hands moved above her head to press against the door. I slid my fingers inside her, and almost immediately she tightened around me, her climax taking her.

She pushed me away slightly and quickly righted her clothing; looking down

at me where I kneeled.

Reality crept back as the various sounds of people dining on the other side of the door combined with the sound of our heavy breathing. “You’re not forgiven,” she said and reached down for her purse, leaving the room without another word.

I stood up slowly and watched the door close behind her, trying to sort out what had just happened. I should have been furious. I should have ran out after her and made her finish what she started. But a smile lifted at the corner of my mouth and I almost laughed at the absurdity of my thoughts. Damn her, she did it again. Once more she proved to be my equal as she beat me at my own game. Only one thought stood out in my mind: game on, Mills.

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My night had been hell. I’d hardly slept or eaten, and I suffered a near-constant hard-on since leaving the restaurant yesterday. I knew I was in for it as I headed to work. She was going to do everything she could to torture and punish me for lying to her; the sick thing was…I was kind of looking forward to it. She was such a bitch, and yet somehow it seemed to make me want her more.

I was surprised to find the outer office empty upon my arrival. Strange, I thought, she was never late.

I continued my way into my office and began getting things in order for the day. Fifteen minutes later, I was distracted from a phone call when I heard the outer door slam. Well, she certainly didn’t disappoint; I could hear drawers and files slamming a bit harder than necessary, and knew this would make for an interesting day.

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At 10:15 I was interrupted by my intercom. “*Mr*. Ryan.” Her cool voice filled the quiet room and despite her obvious annoyance, I found myself smirking as I pressed the button to respond.

“Yes, *Ms. Mills*?” I answered back sarcastically.

“We need to be in the conference room in fifteen minutes. You then have the lunch meeting with the president of Kelly Industries at 12:30,” she stated, her tone entirely professional.

“Are you not accompanying me there?” I asked in confusion; this was an extremely rare occurrence.

Part of me wondered if she was just avoiding being alone with me again. I wasn’t sure how I felt about that.

“No, sir. Strictly management only,” she replied nonchalantly, and I heard her
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papers rustling as she continued to speak. “Besides, I have the arrangements for Seattle to make anyway.”

Well, that made sense…I supposed. “Alright, I’ll be out in a moment,” I retorted and let my finger slide off the button, standing up to adjust my tie and button my jacket.

When I stepped out of my office, my eyes landed on her immediately. Any doubts I might have had about her making me suffer were confirmed. There she stood, leaning over her desk in a beautiful white dress with gold, brown and copper print that showcased her long lean legs perfectly. Her hair was piled on her head accentuating her beautiful neck and when she turned to look at me, I saw she was wearing her glasses. How was I going to manage to speak coherently with her sitting next to me?

With her notebook, Blackberry and pen in hand, she stood and glanced over at me. “Are you ready, Mr. Ryan?” she said in a casual tone as she turned and began walking down the hall toward the elevators. There seemed to be more sway to her hips today, like she was trying to taunt me, to break me. Something I intended to ask her about after the meeting.

Standing in the crowded lift, our bodies were unintentionally pressed together and I had to stifle a groan. It could have been my imagination but I thought I saw a hint of a smirk as she “accidentally” brushed against my semi-erect cock. This woman was evil and confusing, and never ceased to amaze me.

For the next two hours, I was in my own personal hell. Every time I looked at her she was doing something to bring me to my knees; sly glances, licking her bottom lip, crossing and uncrossing her legs or absentmindedly twirling a tendril of hair around her finger. At one point, she dropped her pen and casually placed her hand on my thigh as she bent down to retrieve it from under the table.

Leaning over I whispered in her ear, “What exactly do you think you’re doing, Ms. Mills?” She didn’t meet my eyes as she busied herself looking at the documents before her.

“I’m afraid I don’t know what you’re talking about, Mr. Ryan,” she answered quietly.

“Oh, I think you do, you little tease. Are we going to talk about this?”

“I believe…,” she said, finally meeting my eyes quickly before looking away. “…that we’ve already discussed the matter. I told you yesterday-you are not forgiven.”

Looking around to make sure the others were still interested in the slide show,

I leaned in closer and whispered, “Well, that being said, I’d still like another chance to *prove* how sorry I am.” She might have appeared cool on the outside, but I knew her well enough to see through it.

“Mr. Ryan, I’m quite sure that your days of *proving* anything to me are over.”

“I don’t think I’d be so sure about that, *Ms. Mills*, ” I said before sitting back in my chair. What the hell was I doing? Was I insane? This was the wrong woman to taunt, even I knew that.

As Murphy’s Law would have it, the meeting lasted longer than expected and my father, brother and I had to leave immediately for the lunch meeting that followed. I nodded and spoke at appropriate times, but I was never really there. I was more intent on getting through this meeting so I could get back to the office and sort out what game she was playing.

We returned to find Ms. Mills on the phone, speaking almost inaudibly. “Well, I’m gonna let you go, Dad. I have some things to take care of and I’ll let you know as soon as I can about my visit. You need to get some sleep, ok?” she said softly. After a brief pause she chuckled lightly, but then didn’t say anything else for a prolonged moment. Neither I nor the two men beside me dared say anything. “I love you too, Daddy.”

My stomach tightened as I heard the loving tone in her voice with those words. When she turned around in her chair, her eyes went wide at the sight of us standing there behind her and she began gathering the paperwork on her desk. She glared at me before turning a softer glance to my family.

“How did the meeting go, Carlisle? Emmett?” she said sweetly, as if I wasn’t in the room. I rolled my eyes at the juvenile behavior.

“Well, Chloe,” my father stated, smiling at her warmly. “It went smoothly, as always. You and Angela really do a superb job taking care of things. I don’t know what my sons would do without the two of you.” Her eyebrow lifted slightly and she cleared her throat to speak.

“Well sir, that’s something I actually need to speak with your son about. He’s going to find out; I’m going to need to take some time off to go home for awhile.” I was surprised by the brief sense of panic I felt at those words. She never asked for vacation, and rarely even called in a sick day, so her sudden request took me off guard.

“When?” I asked, trying to appear casual.

My father stepped forward before I could speak and placed his hand on her shoulder. “I think that’s an excellent idea. You haven’t been home in a while; this

will be good for you."

"But," I tried to interrupt but my father shook his head.

"There's nothing you can't manage with the help of a temp, Bennett," he said sternly. I felt my jaw clench.

"We can discuss this later. Right now, the three of you are due for a phone conference in Mr. Ryan's office," she said smiling warmly to them and avoiding my eyes entirely.

I nodded my head, but inside I was fuming. There was no doubt in my mind that while her wish to see her father was genuine, this was also a way to put some distance between us. Maybe this would be a good thing; remove the temptation to avoid falling victim. "Of course. Enjoy your vacation, Ms. Mills."

And with that I walked into my office and slammed the door.

The minute I did it, I was filled with regret. Great-my father was going to have my ass for behaving like that again. Making my way to my desk, I cringed as I heard my dad and Emmett enter. They said nothing as they made themselves comfortable, and I avoided looking at them as I went over some paperwork on my desk.

"Bennett." I sighed at my father's stern tone and set my pen down before meeting his eyes. He was sitting on the leather couch, a disappointed look on his face. "Bennett, do we really need to keep going over this?" he asked quietly.

"Don't waste your time, Dad," Emmett chimed in from across the room. He was standing near the large window, leaning forward watching the traffic below. "I've already had this conversation with him. It won't do any good." I frowned as I peered at him. *Judas.*

"I just don't understand why you two can't be pleasant to each other. You're both smart, wonderful, determined individuals who obviously work together well. I've never heard you say one remark in regards to her performance." I thought I heard a snicker come from Emmett but my attention was quickly drawn back to my father. "I guess I'm just failing to see the connection here. Son, it's been almost a year. Why can't you two just get along like normal adults?" he asked plainly.

Before I could even contemplate an answer, Emmett turned to face me. "I'll tell you the same thing I told him, they're too much alike. They're both too stubborn to back down and too hard-headed to admit when they've judged someone wrong," he said smugly .

“I agree with your brother, Bennett. I’ve seen the way you two work together; you’re an amazing team. You just need to let that carry over onto a personal level.” His face turned suddenly serious.

“You two have the IABC Workshop in Seattle the week after next, am I right?” I nodded stiffly, not liking where this was heading.

“For three days, you and Chloe will be together *without* the buffer of office doors, and there won’t be anyone there to run interference. I expect you to behave as you were raised and treat her with the utmost respect. And before you get defensive,” he added, holding his hands up as he sensed my quick rebuttal. “I’ve already spoken to Chloe about this.” My eyes widened and flew to his face. He had talked to Ms. Mills about our personal relationship?

“Yes, I’m aware that it’s not just you; and she’s assured me that she gives every bit as good as she gets. Why do you think I suggested her as your assistant in the first place? There wasn’t a doubt in my mind that she could hold her own with you. How many assistants did you go through the year before coming to Chicago, Bennett?” he asked with a smirk on his face.

Emmett didn’t even try to hide his snicker this time. It was true that while working for LVMH, I had gone through two assistants during my final year, but that had been due to my high expectations. It was nothing like my current situation with Ms. Mills.

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I frowned slightly as the realization hit me: she had essentially spoken in my defense. She could have easily made it sound like I was unfair to her, but instead she told my dad that she was just as much to blame and could handle it. Saying I was shocked would be an understatement.

“Dad, I’ll admit that the relationship Ms. Mills and I have is unconventional,” I began, praying that no one saw how true that statement really was. “But I assure you, it in no way interferes with our ability to conduct business. You have nothing to worry about.” This seemed to placate my father, and the subject moved on to other matters as we awaited our call.

“So,” my brother began. “Did you guys hear about the little poker game some of the interns set up in the mailroom last night? I’m told it was quite the event.” He shook his head as the laughter overtook him.

“They are an interesting bunch of characters,” my father stated humorously. “Emmett, how in the world do you find out about all this?” Even I was curious.

“Oh, I know pretty much everything that goes on around here,” he remarked. It might have been my guilty conscience, but I swear he looked at me longer

than necessary. “I have to tell you-some of those interns scare the hell out of me.” His laughter brought on my own chuckle; I couldn’t have agreed more. Our conversation was cut short as the intercom buzzed, informing us that our call was ready to begin.

The rest of the day was busy, but rather uneventful. The more thought I gave it, the more Ms. Mills’s impending vacation seemed like a good idea. I was spending far too much time and energy thinking about the situation. I hardly remembered a thing from that morning’s meeting, and I, of all people, knew that wasn’t a very good way to do business. The sheer magnitude of this distraction was so far out of character for me, that it was actually a bit frightening. It would be best to get a handle on things before spending three days together, with only a thin hotel wall separating us. Despite my best efforts, that simple thought was enough to cause my cock to harden slightly. I knew I was in for another long night.

The next few days were extremely busy. I had no more than a few moments at a time alone with her, which strangely seemed to add to the sexual tension that constantly pulsed between us. Small things, like her hand brushing mine as she passed me something during a meeting, a glance across the table as we sat in on a lunch conference, or even the sound of her voice on my voicemail, seemed to amp up my libido even more.

When Thursday morning dawned, I knew we needed to have some sort of discussion. I would be away from the office all day Friday, and today was our last day together for the rest of the week. She had been at a class with the other executive assistants all morning, and I felt myself getting anxious in regards to what I would say to her. I knew I wanted to fuck her again; there was absolutely no question about that. Despite my inappropriate thoughts, my conscience and my own need for self-preservation had been plaguing me all week.

She was right to put distance between us. This pull we felt when we were together was entirely unhealthy. Nothing good could come from it, and I decided once again to use the time apart to build up some sort of resistance to her. Entering the office after lunch I was surprised to find her seated at her desk busily working on the computer. I stopped as I reached the door, once again taken aback by how beautiful she really was. I would never tell her that, but it was impossible to ignore.

“I didn’t know you would be in, Ms. Mills,” I said, trying to keep any emotion from my voice.

“Yes, I had some last minute arrangements to handle with regards to Seattle,

and I still needed to discuss my absence with you," she said, never looking up from her computer monitor.

"Would you like to step into my office, then?" I asked, not sure how I wanted her to respond.

"No," she said quickly. "I think we can handle this out here." Looking up at me with a sly look she motioned to the chair opposite her. "Would you like to have a seat, Mr. Ryan?" *Ahhh, the home court advantage*. I almost chuckled as I realized that she was using one of my own tricks against me. I hesitantly took the seat across from her and waited for her to begin.

"I know you'll be gone tomorrow, so there's no reason for me to be here. I've arranged for you to have a temp while I'm gone next week, and I've already given Angela a detailed list of your schedule and things you'll need. I doubt there will be any problems, but just in case, she's promised to keep an eye on you," she raised an eyebrow in challenge and I rolled my eyes in return.

"You have my numbers, including the number of my father's home in Forks, if you need anything."

She began going through a list in front of her, and I noticed how cool and efficient she was. It wasn't that I wasn't already aware of these things, but somehow it seemed a bit more apparent to me right now. Looking up, our eyes met and she continued, "I'll just plan on picking you up at the airport in Seattle."

Our eyes held for a few moments, and I was almost positive that our thoughts were the same; Seattle would be a colossal test. If we could somehow manage to stay away from each other there, maybe everything would be alright.

The atmosphere in the room began to shift slowly, the silence saying more than words ever could. I clenched my jaw tightly as I noticed that her breathing had picked up. It took every bit of will power I had to not walk around the desk and kiss her. "So, I'll meet you in Seattle then," I said softly, meaning more than my words entailed.

"Yes," she answered flatly.

"Have a nice trip, Ms. Mills," I said, my voice showing none of the inner turmoil I felt. I stood, nodding curtly to her and walking into my office, shutting the door behind me.

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All weekend, I thought about what it would be like to have Ms. Mills gone for an entire week. On one hand, it would be nice to enjoy a full day at work without
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a hard-on or having to partake in a bathroom "session." On the other, I wondered if it would feel odd not having her there. She'd been a near constant in my life for the last year, and regardless of my dislike for her personally, it was somewhat comforting to have her around.

Angela entered my office at nine o'clock sharp, smiling brightly as she approached me. She was followed by an attractive twenty-something brunette who was introduced as Kat, my new temporary assistant. She looked up at me with a somewhat timid smile, and I saw Angela place a reassuring hand on her shoulder. I frowned a bit, realizing what that meant: she'd already been informed about the "Beautiful Bastard". *Great.*

I decided that I would use this as an opportunity. I would prove to everyone that my undeserved reputation was simply a result of working with someone as unpleasant as Ms. Mills, and not related to me in any way.

"It's very nice to meet you, Kat," I said, smiling widely while offering her my hand to shake. She looked at me strangely, with a sort of glazed over expression across her face, before shaking her head slightly and taking my hand.

"It's nice to meet you, too, sir," she said hesitantly, as she looked at Angela questioningly. Angela looked down at my hand and back up to me strangely before speaking to Kat.

"Okay. Well, I've already gone over with you everything that Chloe left for me. Here's your desk," she said leading her over to Ms. Mills's chair.

A strange feeling crept over me at the image of someone else sitting there. I didn't like it; I knew that much already. I felt my smile falter and I turned to Angela, "Well, if she needs anything she'll let you know. I'll be in my office." Before turning, I saw the frightened look Kat exchanged with her. I knew I should be sorry, but I just couldn't find it in myself to care.

Kat quit before lunch. Apparently I came off a bit gruff when she spilled coffee on my desk and managed to start a small fire in the breakroom microwave. The last I saw of her, she was in tears sprinting out my door, wailing something about a hostile work environment.

The second temp came in around two o'clock that afternoon in the form of a young man named Zack.

Zack seemed highly intelligent, and I looked forward to working with someone other than an emotional female. I found myself smiling at the sudden turn of events. Unfortunately, I spoke too soon.

Sitting next to Zack during a financial presentation downtown, I became a bit

uncomfortable and realized that all might not be what it seemed. Every so often I would feel his wool-covered calf brush up against mine under the table, or catch a lingering look at my lap from the corner of my eye. Huh.

Well, this was certainly a first. My suspicions were confirmed as we stood in the elevator awaiting our floor. As the door opened and a few more bodies entered, I was pushed back into Zack's body. My head snapped up at the feeling of something firm behind me. Zack was gone within fifteen minutes.

The third was no better. Her name was Kathy; she talked too much, her clothing was too tight and the way she gnawed on the cap of her pen made her look like an animal trying to free itself from a trap. It was nothing like the way Ms. Mills would pensively hold the end of her pen between her teeth when she was deep in thought. That was subtle and sexy, but this was nothing short of obscene. She was gone by Tuesday afternoon.

The week continued on in much the same way, with me going through five different assistants. I heard the booming laugh of my brother in the hall outside my office on more than one occasion.

Jackass. He didn't even work on this floor. I began to feel that people were enjoying my misery a bit too much and maybe even saw it as a case of reaping what I sowed.

Although I had absolutely no doubt that Ms. Mills had already been informed of my temp nightmares by Angela, I received several texts from her throughout the week, checking on how things were going. I began looking forward to the texts, even checking my phone periodically to see if I might have missed an alert. I hated to admit it, but at this point I would have traded my right nut *and* my Porsche to have her and her harpy disposition back.

It was obvious that besides missing her body, which I did desperately, I had to admit that I also missed the rivalry we had between us. She knew I was bastard, and she put up with it. I had no idea why, but she did. I felt my respect for her professionally, as well as personally, grow during that week apart. I found myself wondering what she was doing and who she was doing it with. I wondered briefly if she'd had any more phone calls with Mike. We had managed to reach a precarious cease-fire in regards to the flower incident, and I wondered if he had called to follow up. I briefly considered calling my mom and casually asking if she knew whether they'd ever gone out, but I knew that would only invite more questions.

I started packing for my flight on Sunday night, and heard my phone chirp from the bed next to my suitcase. I reached for it and was surprised by the name.

Pick u up tomorrow morning 11:30.

Terminal B near arrival screens. Text when you land.

I paused for a moment, realizing that I would see her tomorrow.

I will.

Thanks

I briefly wondered if she would respond, but quickly pushed the thought aside and resumed packing.

When my phone chirped again a minute later, I found myself staring at it. Surely that couldn't be her again.

You're welcome.

Everything go ok?

I was a bit taken back that she had inquired as to the rest of my week. We were in such unchartered territory here. We texted and emailed frequently, but it was usually restricted to simple yes or no answers. Never anything personal. Was it possible she had the same strange frustrating week that I had?

Great.

You?

I laughed softly as I pushed send; this situation kept getting stranger. Less than a minute later I received another one.

My dad is great. I've missed him.

Excited to come home.

See you tomorrow.

Setting the alarm on my phone, I placed it on the nightstand and sat next to my luggage on the bed. I would see her in less than twelve hours. I wasn't entirely sure how I felt about that. My life had become so unsettled, and it was a state that was completely foreign to me. There were so many reasons why I had to stay away from her, and so many more why I couldn't. I'd done so well all week, but she had been 2,000 miles away. What would happen when we spent all day together and she was just down the hall from me at night? I wasn't sure I was ready for that. I shrugged as I realized that whether I was ready or not, it was coming. I just hoped I had the strength to resist.

EBOOK-FCXLUSIVE

TEN – First Light

Just as I'd hoped, the drive to Seattle Monday morning had given me time to think. I felt loved and rested after my visit with my dad, we'd spent time together talking and reminiscing about my mom, hanging out with Sue and even planning a trip for him to come out to Chicago.

By the time he kissed me goodbye, I felt as prepared as possible considering the situation. I was nervous as hell to face Mr. Ryan again, but I'd done my best to try and psyche myself up. I'd done a ton of online shopping and had a suitcase full of new power panties, I'd thought long and hard about my options, and I was pretty sure I had a plan.

The first step was to admit why I had actually left. I knew now that I'd gone to Forks in the hopes that I could hide from my problems. I'd realized pretty early on that it wasn't working. Being two thousand miles apart had done nothing to calm my need for him.

I had dreamt of him nearly every night, waking each morning frustrated and lonely. I spent far too much time thinking about what he was doing, wondering if he was as confused as me, and trying to glean every bit of information I could from Angela about how things were going back home.

We'd had an interesting conversation Tuesday, when she'd called and informed me of the status of my replacement. I'd laughed hysterically hearing about the revolving door of temps. Of course he was having a hard time keeping anyone around. He was an asshole.

I was used to his mood swings and gruff attitude; honestly, they didn't even phase me anymore. I knew I was good at my job and I prided myself on my ability to hold my own with him. Professionally our relationship ran like clockwork, it was personally that we were a nightmare. Almost everyone knew it; they just didn't know the extent of the situation.

I thought back often to our last day together. Something in our relationship was shifting, and I wasn't sure how I felt about it. I'd told him that our physical relationship was over, and I knew I had to try to keep to that. I didn't know if I could succeed, but for my own self-preservation I had to at least try.

When I was completely honest with myself, I knew that I was scared. I was terrified that this man, who was all wrong for me had more control over my body than I did, no matter how much I tried to convince myself otherwise.

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Standing in the arrival area, I gave myself one last pep talk. I could do this. Oh God, I hoped I could do this. The butterflies in my stomach were working overtime and I briefly worried I might throw up.

His plane had been delayed in Chicago and it was after 6:30 before he finally touched down in Seattle.

Seven extra hours of thinking had done nothing to calm my nerves.

I stood on my tip toes trying to get a better view through the crowd, but didn't see him. Looking down at my phone, I reread his text again.

Just landed-see you in a few.

There was nothing sweet about it in the slightest, but it caused my stomach to flutter nonetheless.

Our texts last night had been the same way. It wasn't that we said anything special; I'd merely inquired as to how the rest of his week had gone. That wouldn't be considered unusual in any other relationship, but it was a completely new occurrence for us. Maybe there was a chance we could actually get past the constant animosity and actually be what? Friends?

I paced back and forth, willing my mind to switch gears and my heart rate to calm. This was going to be harder than I thought. Without thinking, I stopped mid-step and turned towards the oncoming crowd. A thrill ran through me as I stepped forward, searching through the sea of unknown faces; my body already responding to his nearness. My breath caught in my throat when a head of messy hair appeared above the others. *Get a hold of yourself Chloe. Shit.*

I tried once more to get my body under control and looked up again. *Fuck. I am so screwed.* There he was, looking sexier than I'd ever seen him. How the hell does someone get better looking in nine days? His hair was a nightmare as usual; no doubt he'd had his hands in it a hundred times during the last hour. He wore black slacks, a dark charcoal blazer and a white dress shirt that was unbuttoned slightly. He looked tired and had a bit of stubble on his face, but that wasn't what had my heart beating a mile a minute. He had been looking down at the ground, but the moment our eyes met, his face split into the most genuine, beautiful smile I'd ever seen. The term "panty drop" passed through my mind, and before I could stop it I felt my own smile spread slowly across my face in return. Well, this was certainly new.

He stopped in front of me, a slightly tenser look upon his face, while both of us waited for the other to say something. "Hi." I said awkwardly, trying to ease some of the tension between us. Every part of me wanted to pull him into the

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ladies room, but somehow I doubted that was the proper way to great your boss.

"Um, hi," he answered, his brow furrowed slightly.

Fuck, snap out of it Chloe! We both turned, heading towards the baggage claim and I felt goosebumps spread across my skin just being near him.

"Sooo…how was your flight?" I inquired. This was so ridiculous. I wished he would just say something stupid so I could go back to yelling at him. That was so much easier to deal with.

He thought about it for a moment before answering, "It was pleasant enough, once we actually got off the ground." We stopped and waited, surrounded by bustling people, but the only thing I noticed was the tension building between us.

Minutes passed in uncomfortable silence and I was more than a bit relieved when I saw his black Louis Vuitton luggage slide down the conveyor belt. We both reached for it at the same time and our hands touched briefly on the handle. Pulling my hand back, I glanced up at him to find he was watching me.

My stomach dropped at the familiar look of hunger in his eyes. We both muttered apologies and I looked away quickly, but not before noticing the slight smirk on his face. Fortunately, it was time to pick up the rental car, and we headed towards the parking garage. This was not going to plan.

His eyes widened and a look of pure appreciation spread across his face as we approached the rental car, a 2009 Audi TT. He loved to drive-well he loved to drive fast would be a more accurate description-and I always made a point of ordering something fun for him when he needed a rental car.

"*Very nice*, Ms. Mills," he said appreciatively, his hand sliding along the hood of the beautiful sports car. "Remind me to give you a raise."

I nearly choked at his words and my eyes flew to him in shock. He shrugged his shoulders, giving me an innocent look and I could have killed him. *He was fucking with me.*

Pressing the button to release the trunk I gave him a reproachful look and stepped aside for him to put his things away. He took off his jacket and handed it to me, and I swear to God, the scent made my clit twitch.

I watched the splay of muscles across his back through his shirt as he placed his luggage in the trunk next to mine; irritatingly fascinated by the way they clenched and tightened with his movements.

Closing the lid and breaking me out of my daze, he turned to me to take his jacket and I placed the keys in his hand. He walked over and opened my door,

waiting for me to be seated before closing it behind me. *Yeah, you're a real gentleman,* I thought sarcastically. Then with a quick walk to the other side, he settled into his own seat and smiled as he started the car. I rolled my eyes as he revved the engine before pulling out of the spot.

We drove in silence, the only sound the purr of the engine and the GPS calling out directions to the hotel. I busied myself going over our schedule, trying to ignore the man next to me. I wanted to look at him, to study his face. I wanted to reach out and touch the slight stubble on his jaw, to tell him to pull over and touch me.

All these thoughts ran through my mind, making it impossible to concentrate on the papers in front of me. The time apart hadn't lessened his hold over me at all. If anything it made it stronger. With a sigh I closed the folder in my lap and turned to look out the window.

We must have passed tall buildings and people on the streets, but I didn't see a thing. The only thing that pierced my consciousness was him. I felt every movement, every breath. His talented fingers tapped along the steering wheel. The leather sighing when he shifted in his seat. His scent filled the car and made it impossible to remember why I needed to resist. He completely surrounded me.

I didn't want to want him. I needed to be strong and be my own person, to prove that I controlled my path in life, but every part of me ached to feel him. I didn't want to feel all this… this wasn't the person I wanted to be. I needed to regroup at the hotel, remember the anger and hurt that he caused, and be the strong woman I knew I was.

"Are you okay, Ms. Mills?" The sound of his voice startled me and I turned to meet his green eyes, my stomach fluttering at the intensity behind them. "We're here." He motioned to the hotel, and I was surprised to see I hadn't even noticed. "Is everything alright?" He looked concerned, and I was a bit taken back by it. It's not that I wasn't aware he could be caring and kind; it was just rarely ever directed towards me.

"Yeah," I answered quickly. "I'm just tired. I want to get up to my room and shower and go to bed."

"Hmm," He murmured to himself, continuing to look at me. I saw his gaze flicker to my mouth, and *God*, I wanted him to kiss me. *Badly*. As if drawn to him, I leaned forward slightly in my seat, the soft leather of the chair creaking. A hum of electricity buzzed between us, and his gaze once again flickered to my lips. He leaned in to meet me, and I could feel his hot breath against my mouth.

I was startled out of the moment when my door opened suddenly and I jumped back into my seat, shocked to see the valet driver standing there. Clearing my throat and feeling more than a little embarrassed that I was once again falling into his trap, I stepped out of the car, inhaling the air that wasn't permeated by his scent. The valet took the bags, and Mr. Ryan excused himself to take a phone call while I checked us in.

The beautiful hotel was packed with fellow conference goers, and I saw several familiar faces. Usually I met up with a group of other assistants and we went to dinner or a club while in town together.

I waved to someone I recognized and was glad I had planned ahead when I packed. It would be great to get out with some girls while we were here. The last thing I needed was to sit alone in my hotel room and fantasize about the beautiful man down the hall.

After receiving our keys, I headed to the lounge in search of Mr. Ryan. As I scanned the large room I was surprised to find him standing next to a tall brunette. They stood close together, his head bent slightly as he listened to something she said.

His body blocked her face from my view, and my eyes narrowed when I noticed her hand reach up and grip his forearm. She laughed at something he'd said and he pulled away slightly, allowing me a better look.

She was incredibly beautiful, with shoulder-length, straight dark hair. She looked up and our eyes met across the room. Quirking an eyebrow at me in challenge, she looked back up at him, smiling as she placed something in his hand and folded his fingers around it.

A strange look crossed his face as he bent his head to examine the object in his palm. *You have got to be kidding me!* Did she-did she just give him her room key? *What the hell?*

I watched for a moment more, and then something inside me snapped. The thought of him looking at someone else with the same intensity, the thought of him *wanting* someone else at all, made my stomach twist with anger.

I'd told myself over and over that I'd stay away. But in that moment, with his hand gripping *her* room key, all sense of reason disappeared. All I felt was anger, and that increasingly familiar sense of possession.

He was *mine*, and I'd be damned if someone was going to take him from me. Before I could stop myself, I was moving across the room until I stood beside them.

PROOF EXHIBIT

I placed my hand on his forearm, and he looked over to meet my eyes; a surprised, questioning expression on his face. I smiled and before turning to glare at her. "*Excuse me*," I sneered. I inwardly cheered at the confused look on her face.

"*Bennett*, are you ready to head upstairs?" I said softly to him.

His eyes widened and his mouth opened in shock. I'd never seen him look so utterly at a loss for words. "Bennett?" I asked once more and something flickered across his eyes. Slowly the corner of his mouth lifted into a smirk and our gazes held for a moment. Something passed between us and I felt both thrilled and frightened at the same time.

Turning back to her, he smiled and spoke in a voice so smooth it sent a tremor through me. "Excuse us," he said, placing her key back in her hand. "As you can see, I didn't come here alone." A sense of euphoria flowed over me at those words, completely overriding the horror I *should* have been feeling.

I glanced back at her victoriously; thrilled to see the shocked and insulted look on her face.

I felt his warm hand rest on the small of my back as he led us out of the lounge and down the hall.

However the closer we got to the elevators, the more my elation was replaced with something else. I began to panic as I realized how irrationally I had acted.

My heart was racing, the sound of my blood rushing in my ears. Three other couples joined us in the elevator, and I prayed to God I could make it to my room before I exploded. I couldn't believe what I'd just done. *What the hell happened to trying to stay away from him?* I glanced up to see him wearing a triumphant smirk, and was again filled with fury over this entire situation.

I took a deep breath and tried remind myself that this was why I needed to stay away. What happened down there was completely out of character for me. I'd crossed a line I had very carefully drawn between us. I wanted to scream at him, to hurt him and enrage him like he had me, but it was getting harder and harder to find the will.

We rode up in a tense silence, until the last couple stepped out, leaving us alone. I tried to tell myself to wait, just a few minutes more and I would be safe, but the fight was over before it started.

I didn't want him with someone else, and that feeling was so overwhelming that it took my breath away.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

I wanted him with every part of me. I *needed* him.

My body reacted on instinct. I gripped his shirt roughly, pushing him against the elevator wall, and pulled his mouth to mine. The air left his lungs as my body collided against his. He froze momentarily before groaning deeply and melting against my lips.

Every second of being away from him erupted in that kiss. The longing and ache I felt was reflected in every sweep of his tongue and brush of his lips. I took a step forward wanting to be closer. It was never enough.

His arms went around me and an alarm finally sounded in my head. *I couldn't do this*. The lift stopped and I pushed him away. *What was I doing?* I promised myself I would try. Instead I threw myself at him the first moment we were truly alone. Where was my self respect? Had I lost it all?

He looked at me, confusion marring his features as he panted for breath, surely seeing the panic in my eyes. I had to get away. "I promised myself I wouldn't do this." I groaned, more to myself than him. And before my resistance could collapse completely, I turned, rushing out of the elevator.

"Where the fuck are you going?" He shouted after me.

"I don't want to talk about this now!" I shouted back. *Fuck!* Did we have to be at the very end of the hall?

I heard his footsteps behind me and knew there was going to be trouble.

I couldn't outrun him forever. And I wasn't even sure I wanted to anymore.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

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Bennett's POV

What the hell just happened?

Did she-

And then-

What the-

A million thoughts ran through my mind in that second. We couldn't keep doing this. Either this would continue or it had to stop. *Now*. It was interfering with my business, my sleep, my head, my fucking life. But no matter how much I tried to kid myself, I knew what I wanted. I couldn't let her leave.

She practically sprinted down the hall and I chased after her. "Stop!" I yelled,
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oblivious to the occupants of the rooms around us. She ignored me, continuing to stride away from me.

“I can’t talk to you about this right now. I’m tired and upset and I just need some sleep.”

“You can’t pull something like that and then expect me to just let you walk away!”

“The hell I can’t!” She yelled over her shoulder. She reached her door and fumbled with her key slightly before shoving it open. *Shit!* We had to talk about this now! We were always running away from each other, and what was going on.

I was fucking tired of running.

I reached the door just in time, and her eyes met mine briefly before she pushed it closed. My hand shot out, slamming it back so forcefully that it crashed into the wall behind it.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?” she screamed. She stepped into the bathroom opposite the door, and spun around to face me.

“Will you quit fucking running from me?!” I followed her into the large marble bathroom, our voices echoing off the walls. “Don’t act like this! If it’s about that woman-” She looked impossibly more furious at my words and took a step towards me.

“Don’t you dare-God, I’m just so sick of this!” She shook her head in disgust before turning towards the counter and rummaging through her purse.

“I wasn’t going to do anything! You think I would be interested in just any random woman who puts her room key in my hand? What the hell kind of man do you think I am? ” I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. Hadn’t I told her I hadn’t been with anyone else since her? Where was this all coming from? “Did you not understand-“

“No, *you* don’t understand!” She slammed a brush on the counter, looking up at me furiously. “I’m not like this! I don’t just sleep with random men. I’m twenty-six and I’ve only been with three other men my entire life! I’ve never done anything close to this!” she yelled, her voice getting louder with each word. “But when I’m with you, it’s like nothing else matters. This…this thing,” she continued, gesturing between us, “This isn’t me! It’s like I turn into a different person when I’m with you, and I *hate* it. Maybe you can just sleep with whoever you want, but that’s not who I am!”

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

I couldn’t believe what she was saying. It was true that I hadn’t given much thought to her personal life, now or ever really. I had no idea that there was even a ghost of chance that she might feel like that. Sure, I had slept with my fair share of women, but she *had* to know how different this was for me by now.

“I don’t want anyone else!” I yelled back. “I only want you.” I felt like I was shattering into a million pieces. My life felt out of control, and I turned to leave, all the while knowing that I’d never be strong enough to actually go. I heard her take a deep breath and set something on the counter.

Her voice was shaky when she spoke. “Look-I don’t care. You just do whatever the hell you want to do and leave me alone. Now if you’ll excuse me.”

She turned towards the shower, opening the glass door and turning on the water, and then turned to look at me, waiting for me to go.

I couldn’t leave. It wasn’t a choice anymore. Without thinking I crossed the room, gripping her face between my hands and pulled her to me. The moment our lips touched, everything felt right.

My lips were rough and unyielding but she didn’t move away. Wrapping her hands in my hair, she pulled and clawed, drawing me closer. I moaned loudly into her mouth as the familiar curves of her body pressed against mine. My hands went to her hair, pulling roughly, as my body pushed her backwards. I was lost to everything but her. We bumped into a wall, the counter, the shower door, shifting and pulling in our desperation. The room was filling with steam, and nothing seemed real. I could smell, taste and feel her, but none of it was enough.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

We broke our kiss to breathe, and I dragged my lips down closer to her ear. “I don’t want to stop anymore,” I groaned against her skin, begging her wordlessly not to ask it of me.

“Don’t stop,” she whispered. My body stilled, my hot breath shaky and heavy in her ear as I reveled in both the sound and meaning of her words. Closing my eyes, I let the feeling consume me.

“Tell me.” I ran my nose down her neck, never freeing her from my grasp. She arched and writhed against me, silently begging me to take her. I couldn’t though, not yet, not until I heard her say it. I couldn’t surrender alone. We had to be in this together. “Tell me you want me…only me.”

Her breath caught, and she quietly sighed, “Only you.”

My last wall fell the moment she said those words. I brought my eyes to hers, running my thumb across her lip. Her mouth was inches from mine, her hot breath fanning across my face. She leaned in to press her lips to me, but I

stopped her for a moment. I waited for the fight to rise in me, for the hate to take over, but it never came. For the first time in my life I was admitting defeat. It was fucking scary as hell but I just couldn't fight it any more. With one last shaky breath, I closed my eyes and brought her lips to mine.

Our kisses were deeper, our touches wilder. She pushed me back against the wall and I gave myself over to her. A rush of warmth cascading across my shoulder and down my chest brought me out of my haze momentarily. With our clothes still on, we had backed into the shower. We were getting soaked but I couldn't find it in myself to care.

Her hands roamed my body frantically, yanking my shirt from my pants. In one motion she tore open the front, the sound of tinkling buttons bouncing off the marble floor. With shaky hands she slid the wet fabric from my shoulders and tossed it outside the shower door.

The soaked silk of her dress clung to her body, accentuating every curve. My hands traced the fabric along her breasts, feeling her tight nipples underneath. She moaned and brought her hand to rest on mine, guiding my movements. The sight of her hand covering mine was one of the most erotic things I'd ever seen, making my impossibly hard cock throb and ache.

"Tell me what you want." My voice was rough with need. "Tell me the things you want me to do to you." I bit my lip as her brown eyes met mine, our hands continuing to knead and pinch her nipples through her dress, our faces only a breath apart.

"I want to feel you everywhere." She whispered into my mouth. I bit my lip again and a groan escaped. This woman would be my undoing. Everything about her called to me; her body, her mind, even her temper.

I skimmed my hands down her sides and up under her dress. We teased and bit at each other's mouths, the sound of the shower drowning out our moans. I slipped my hands into her panties and felt her warmth against my fingers. She was slick and ready, and I couldn't wait to be inside her.

Needing to see more of her, I removed my fingers from her and slid them up to the hem of her dress.

In one movement I pulled it up and over her head, and stopped dead in my tracks at the sight of what lay underneath. Sweet Shit. She was trying to kill me.

I took a step back, leaning against the shower wall for support. She stood before me, soaking wet in white lace panties that tied on the side with a satin bow. Her nipples were hard and visible beneath the matching bra and I couldn't

stop myself from reaching out to touch them.

“Fuck, you are so beautiful.” I said, running my fingertips along her taut breasts. A visible shiver ran through her and my hand traveled upward, across her collar bone, along her neck and finally to her jaw.

We could fuck right here, wet and slippery against the tile, but I wanted to take my time. My heart sped up at the thought that we had an entire night ahead of us. No rushing out or hiding for once. We had one whole night alone and I was going to spend the entire time with her… in a bed.

My body shuddered as that thought took hold. I would make every moment count. Pulling her to me until our chests were touching, I reached behind her, and turned off the shower. My lips grazed hers lightly at first, then once again more firmly. She pushed against me, pressing her body further into mine. I cradled her face in my hands as our kiss deepened, my tongue sliding easily against hers.

Her hips rocked against me and I pushed the shower door open, holding on to her as we stepped out.

Our kiss never broke as we made our way out of the bathroom, stumbling clumsily while we desperately tore at our remaining clothes. I kicked off my wet shoes as I backed her into the bedroom, her hands raking along my stomach as she reached for my belt. Guiding her hands, I was quickly free of my pants and boxers. In a rush, I kicked them aside where they landed in a wet pile.

The backs of my fingers traced along her ribs before sliding to the clasp of her bra, releasing it and almost ripping it off her body in one movement. Pulling her closer, I groaned into her mouth as her hard nipples grazed my chest. Even the tips of her wet hair, tickling my hands as they roamed her naked back, felt electric against my skin. I was so completely lost in the frenzy of our kiss and the power of our physical connection that I had no sense of anything else. Her body and the way it felt entwined with mine was everything. It was the only thing that mattered.

The room was dark, the only illumination coming from the small sliver of light that crept out from the bathroom door, and the moon in the late Seattle sky. The back of her knees hit the bed and my hands ran down to the last piece of clothing between us. My mouth moved from her lips, down her neck, and across her breasts and torso. I placed soft biting kisses across her stomach and finally to the white lace that hid the rest of her from view.

Sliding to my knees in front of her, I looked up and met her eyes. Her hands

were in my hair, running her fingers through the messy strands as she bit her lip. I wanted this to be different and I took a calming breath to help me slow my movements.

Reaching out I took one delicate satin ribbon between my fingers and pulled, watching it slide down her hip slightly. A look of confusion crossed her face as I continued running my fingers along the lace edge to the other side and did the same. The fabric slid from her body undamaged until she stood completely naked before me. I smiled at the fact that I would still take them with me, and she smirked as she seemed to read my thoughts. I guided her back so that she sat on the edge of the bed, still kneeling in front of her.

I spread her legs slightly, running my hands down the silky skin. I placed kisses on her feet and up her calves, along her thighs and between her legs. Pushing her back to lie across the sheets I finally moved up to join her. I continued to run my lips and tongue along her body, her hands still tangling in my hair, guiding where she wanted me most.

Her sighs and moans filled the air and mingled with my own. I was harder than I'd ever been and I wanted to bury myself in her over and over again. I reached her mouth and she pulled me down to her, every inch of our naked bodies aligned perfectly as we kissed and explored.

We kissed frantically, our hands seeking and grasping wildly as we tried to get as close as possible. Our hips rocked together, my cock sliding against her soaking wet pussy. Each pass along her clit elicited a moan. With one tiny move, I could be deep inside her.

I wanted to do that more than anything, but I knew that I needed to hear something from her first.

When she said my name downstairs, it set something off inside me I didn't know existed. I needed her to say it, to hear it was me she wanted. I didn't need her love or her heart, but I needed to know that for now, she was mine and mine alone.

"I want to be inside you, Chloe." I whispered into her ear. Her breath caught and a deep moan emanated from her lips. "Is that what you want?"

"Yes," she whimpered softly, her voice pleading and her hips rocked higher off the bed in search of me. "Please." I felt my cock twitch at her words. The tip grazed her entrance and I clenched my jaw, wanting to prolong this.

Her heels ran up and down my legs, finally locking around my waist. I took each of her hands and placed them above her head, entwining our fingers. "Look

at me.” I commanded. “I need to hear it.”

My voice was wavering with the control I felt slipping. She looked up at me and I knew she understood.

“Fuck me, Bennett. I need to feel you inside me.” My head fell so our foreheads touched and I finally pushed deep inside her. “Oh, fuck,” she moaned.

“Say it again.” I was becoming breathless as I began to move in and out of her.

“Oh, Bennett.” The breathy sound of my name on her lips thrilled me. I wanted to hear it again and again. I pulled myself up on my knees and began thrusting into her more steadily, both of our hands still entwined.

“Fuck, Chloe, you feel so good around me.” I was getting close and I needed to hold out. I’d been away from her too long, and nothing I’d fantasized about while she was away compared to this. “I want to fuck you like this every day.” I growled against her damp skin. “Every time I see you in those pretty little dresses, I want to bend you over and teach you a lesson for teasing me.”

“Fuck.” She hissed between clenched teeth. “Why do I love it when you talk to me like that?” I smiled against her neck, knowing that she was as helpless to this as I was.

Our bodies moved together effortlessly, sweat slicked skin sliding against skin. With each thrust she raised her hips to meet me, her legs around my waist pulling me deeper. I was so lost in her that time seemed to stop. Our hands were still tightly clasped above her head and she began gripping tighter.

She was getting close, her cries becoming louder and my name leaving her lips over and over, pushing me closer to the edge.

“Come for me, Chloe. I want to feel that tight pussy come on me.” My voice was ragged with the desperation I felt. I was so close but I wanted to wait for her.

“Oh God, Bennett,” she moaned. “Say something else.” *Fuck*. My girl got off on dirty talk. Wait; did I just say my girl? “*Please*.” The sound of her pleading was enough to distract me from that thought for now, and I turned my head to whisper in her ear.

“I fucking love being inside you, my little tease. I’m gonna fuck you all night long. You won’t be able to walk tomorrow.” Fuck, if I kept this up I was going to lose it. Her legs pulled me closer, her hands gripping mine so tightly it was almost painful, and I began to feel her tighten around me.

That was all it took. I let go of my control and deepened my strokes, lifting her off the bed with every thrust. I was teetering on the edge now, and when she cried out my name, I couldn't hold back any longer. "Fuck! Chloe!"

"Oh God! Bennett!" Her screams were muffled against my neck as I felt her body go rigid and her muscles contract around me. Nothing in the world felt as good as this, feeling the rush build inside and crash over us together.

Our bodies began to calm and I brought my face back to hers, our noses touching. "That was…" I trailed off, unable to find the words. My mouth was dry, my muscles ached and I was exhausted. I loosened her grip on my hands and rubbed her fingers gently, trying to bring some of the circulation back.

"I know." She chuckled weakly against my lips. Rolling over I pulled her with me, her head coming to rest between my shoulder and neck. She shuddered lightly and I looked down at her.

"Cold?" I asked, my fingers moving to her still damp hair.

"No." She answered, shaking her head slightly. "Just….overwhelmed." I pulled her to me and reached down, dragging the blankets over us. I didn't want to leave, but I wasn't sure if I was welcome to stay either.

"Me too." The silence stretched between us, and I wondered if she had fallen asleep. I shifted slightly and was surprised to hear her voice.

"Don't go." She whispered into the darkness. My breath caught in my throat at the feelings her words caused. I wanted to stay, but I was scared to.

This was so new to us, so new to me. Had things changed between us? I needed to say something, but I was afraid to say the words. What were we to each other? I was so tired and wanted to wait until morning, but I knew that here in the dark, the words would come easier.

"Chloe," I was so surprised at how good it felt to say her name, that something so simple could be so powerful. I felt her stiffen slightly; obviously waiting for me to say I was leaving. "I want to stay."

I felt her release a deep breath and it fanned across my neck. I hesitated with what I needed to say. "I can't stay away from you anymore." I paused, still trying to organize my thoughts. "I know it's wrong for me to want you, but…it's never been like this for me before." I'd never had to be so honest with a woman, to admit such a weakness.

"Me either." Her words were so quiet I wouldn't have heard them if we hadn't been wrapped around each other. My hands continued to play with her hair and

FROM EXCLUSIVE

my eyes began to drift closed, her breathing had evened out and before long I was lost in sleep.

My eyes fluttered as another shock of pleasure went through me. Fuck, that felt good. I didn't want to wake up and face the reality that I was alone. Something warm and wet enveloped my cock again and I groaned loudly. *Best. Dream. Ever.* I heard a moan and a vibration went from my dick straight through me.

"Mmmm, Chloe." I heard my own voice and it sounded strange. I'd dreamed of her hundreds of times but this seemed so real. The warmth disappeared and I frowned. Where did she go?

"Say it again." A soft, throaty voice broke into my consciousness and I forced myself to open my eyes.

The room was dark and I was lying in a strange bed. The warmth was back and my eyes flew to my lap. A beautiful dark head of hair was kneeling between my open legs, my cock deep in her mouth. In a rush the entire night came back to me, the haze of sleep rapidly disappearing.

"Chloe?" There was no way I could be lucky enough for this to be real. She must have gotten up sometime in the night to shut off the bathroom light, the room was so dark I could barely make her out. My hands drifted out to find her, my fingers tracing her pink lips around my cock.

She lifted her head slightly and I groaned at the image of my cock in her mouth. My head fell back to the pillow as she took me further in, the tip hitting the back of her throat. "Oh fuck, Chloe. That feels so good." She moaned again in response and my hips lifted automatically.

She bobbed her mouth up and down on me, her tongue swirling and her teeth raking lightly against my shaft with each movement. Her hand slipped to my balls and I moaned loudly as she rolled them gently in her palm.

"Fuck. That's the prettiest thing I've ever seen, my cock sliding in and out of that beautiful mouth of yours."

The feeling was so intense, the realization of my dreams and reality coming together, that I didn't know how long I could last. She moved slightly, her finger lightly rubbing a spot just below my balls, and a long hiss escaped my clenched teeth. No one had ever done that to me. I almost wanted to stop her, but the feeling was so incredible I was helpless to move.

My fingers ran through her hair and across her face and jaw. She closed her eyes and increased the suction, bringing me closer and closer to the edge. The

unreal combination of her mouth on my cock and her finger pressing against me was the most intense sensation I'd ever experienced. She increased the pressure of her fingers and it sent my orgasm crashing through me. "Fuck Chloe! Oh fuck, fuck, fuck." Now that I was saying her name, it was so hard to stop.

She kept her mouth on me and continued to suck as the most powerful climax of my life subsided.

"What the fuck was that?" I gasped. She let my cock slip from her mouth and looked at me with a satisfied smirk. Holy shit, this woman never ceased to amaze me. "Get up here." I ordered.

Sitting up, I pulled her into my lap, wrapping her legs around my hips. Our naked chests pressed together, I took her face in my hands, looking into her eyes. "That is the best wake-up call I've ever gotten." She chuckled lightly, taking her bottom lip between her teeth.

Pulling her mouth to mine, I kissed her deeply, relishing in every inch of her naked skin. My hands ran down her arms and across her breasts. She moaned and arched into me, her head falling back and to the side. I kissed and nibbled up and down her neck, feeling myself harden again. Her hips rocked against me and she looked up at me mischievously.

"Didn't you say something about making sure I couldn't walk tomorrow?" She raised an eyebrow at me in challenge and I groaned.

"You are such a naughty girl," I said against her lips. Reaching down I placed my cock at her entrance and lifted her slightly. "But, you're right. A promise is a promise."

In one smooth motion I was deep inside her again, and we both moaned at the sensation. Her forehead fell to my shoulder and she rocked her hips forward slightly taking me further inside.

She was hot and wet and I was once again amazed at how well we fit together. Her arms wrapped around my shoulders and I gripped her hips, guiding her up and down my cock. I'd never been in this position before; it felt so intimate and yet so right for us. We certainly weren't close emotionally, but there was never anyone I was closer to physically than her.

Closing my eyes I tried to concentrate on every sensation as it hit me. Her hard nipples brushing against my chest, her hair tickling my shoulders, the heat of her wrapped around me; all of it seemed to combine to make time stand still. I don't know how long we stayed like that, rocking against the other, kissing and touching, but slowly the room began to lighten.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

The pleasure built in waves until I was at the breaking point. She leaned back slightly, changing the angle of my thrusts, and moaned loudly. “Bennett, I’m almost there.” Her voice was low and full of need, and I let my hand slide down her body to where we were joined, teasing her clit with my thumb.

The sight before me was breathtaking. Her head was tossed back in ecstasy, and her hair a tangled mess. She had smudged make-up under her eyes and she looked tired as hell, but knowing that I was the cause of it all made her look more beautiful than I’d ever seen her.

I couldn’t believe that this was the same woman that I would have said I hated a little over a month ago. I knew we had a long way to go, but somewhere along the way, the lines had become blurred. I knew now it wasn’t exactly *her* I hated, but rather the feelings that she evoked within me. If I could learn to control them, maybe we could find a way to continue this. We would have to keep it between us and of course it would be strictly physical, but for the first time, I saw that it might be possible.

With each swivel of her hips, the pressure was beginning to build again. I gripped her tighter, fearing briefly that I would leave bruises, and quickened my thrusts. She moaned and writhed above me and just when I thought I couldn’t hold out any more, she called my name and I felt her begin to spasm powerfully around my cock. The intensity of her orgasm brought on my own, and I spilled myself into her for the second time that night.

EBOOK BOYLIFE

She collapsed against me and I lowered us both to the bed. We were sweaty and panting and utterly exhausted, and yet I couldn’t help the small smile that lifted the corners of my mouth.

I pulled her to me; her back pressed against my chest and wrapped my arms around her, entangling my legs with hers. She mumbled something I couldn’t make out, but was asleep before I could ask her about it.

The dynamics had shifted tonight, and my last thought as my eyes closed was that there would be plenty of time to talk tomorrow. But as the early morning sunlight began to creep under the dark curtain, I realized with an uneasy feeling, that tomorrow was already here.

ELEVEN – Je Ne Regrette Rien

Consciousness fluttered on the edge of my sleep-filled mind, and I tried to force it away. I didn't want to wake up. I was warm and comfortable and content. *God, this was the best hotel bed ever.*

Vague visions of my dream passed behind my closed eyes as I snuggled into the warmest, best-smelling blanket I'd ever slept in. It snuggled back.

Something warm pressed against me, and my eyes fluttered open to see a head of familiar messy hair inches from my face. A hundred images flashed through my mind in that second as the reality of last night came crashing down on my muddled brain. *Holy shit*. It was real.

My heart rate quickened as I lifted my head slightly to see the beautiful man wrapped around me. His head lay on my chest, his perfect mouth parted slightly, causing wisps of warm breath to fan across my bare breasts. His long body lay flush along mine, our legs tangled together and his strong arms wrapped tightly around my torso.

He stayed.

The intimacy of our position hit with a crushing force that actually took my breath away. The flood of emotions overwhelmed me, causing my stomach to turn and my chest to ache. He didn't just stay, he *clung* to me.

Never in all my life had I been in such a powerful moment, and I struggled to find my breath and not panic. I was utterly aware of each inch of our touching bodies. I felt his warm breath float over my skin and the powerful thump of his heartbeat against my chest. My fingers burned to run along his skin. My lips ached to press against his hair. It was too much. *He* was too much.

Something changed last night and I wasn't sure I was ready to deal with it. I didn't know what that change entailed, but it was there. In every move, every touch, every word and every kiss; we had been one. I trembled slightly at that thought. No man had ever made me feel that way, as if my body were made to fit his.

I'd been with other men, but nothing like this. I felt as if I were being carried away by a force of nature, completely unable to change the course. It was terrifying, yet somehow it felt right; and I wasn't sure if I could fight it any more.

Closing my eyes tightly, I tried to quell the sense of panic that was building. I didn't regret what happened. It was intense and beautiful, but I needed a few minutes by myself before I could face him.

Placing one hand into his hair and the other on his back, I managed to roll him off me slightly. He began to stir and I froze, holding him close and silently willing him to go back to sleep. He mumbled my name before his breathing evened out again, and I slipped out from underneath him. I smiled slightly despite myself. Was he dreaming about me? Did he know I was still here?

I watched him sleep for a moment, the panic receding somewhat, and was once again struck by just how beautiful he was. Still in sleep, his features were tranquil and peaceful, and so very different from any expression he ever wore around me. His hair was a mess, no doubt from my hands running through it all night. A soft wave had fallen down across his forehead, and my fingers longed to brush it back. Long lashes, perfect cheekbones, full pouty lips, and a stubble-covered jaw completed the most gorgeous face I'd ever seen on a man.

His body was lean and muscular with a sprinkling of hair that ran from his chest and dipped below the tangled white sheet that sat across his narrow hips. Against my will, my body responded instantly to the man that lay before me. I needed to get away.

Slipping out of the bed quietly, I headed to the safety of the bathroom. A path of wet, discarded clothing littered the perfect white carpet, forming a trail that led from the bathroom to the bed.

Stepping over them, I continued walking until I felt the cool marble floor beneath my feet.

Closing the door with the softest click, I flipped on the light and peered at my naked reflection in the mirror. *Wow. Freshly fucked.* That was definitely how I looked.

Leaning in, I examined the barely noticeable red bites that were scattered along my neck, shoulders, breasts and stomach. Glancing down, I ran my fingers down my inner thigh. *Yep, there too*. My nipples hardened as I recalled the feeling of his unshaven face brushing along my skin.

My hair was a wild and tangled mess, and I bit my lip as I remembered his hands twisted in it. The way he pulled me first into his kiss, and then onto his cock… *Not helping.*

It was time to think. What did I want? Honestly, I had no idea. Could I go back to the way things were?

Absolutely not. I'd only been away from him for a few minutes, and I could already feel the pull from the other side of the door. As scary as it was, I wanted to go back to him.

Another look in the mirror reminded me that there were a few things I needed to take care of first.

Reaching for my shampoo and conditioner in my overnight bag, I opened the shower door and stopped, my heart dropping into my stomach. *Oh shit*. Tossed in a wet, expensive pile in the corner of the shower was my dress. "Damnit!"

Bending over, I retrieved it and held it out in front of me. Although I had certainly not complained when he ripped it off me last night, I couldn't keep from cringing when I remembered what I had paid for it. Or all the other things he'd ruined for that matter.

I was seriously considering starting a tab.

Laying it out on the counter, I paused, recalling the unused La Perla account he'd opened for me.

I'd briefly considered using it to teach him a lesson, perhaps going on an orgasm inducing shopping spree, but had quickly discarded the thought. I didn't even want to imagine the implications of doing that.

Inwardly cursing him, I hung it on the towel rack to dry and turned to start the shower.

Letting the water run through my hands, I considered how last night had started. Jealousy was not something I was used to feeling. Yet this was the second time those feelings had pushed me to do something rash.

At least we were finally being completely honest with each other. For the first time since this had begun, I felt like I had a clearer picture of who he was. In the heat of the moment, I'd revealed things that I would have rather kept private, but it felt good to finally say them out loud.

The biggest surprise had been his reaction. I had felt scared and vulnerable, no longer able to handle battling emotions swirling inside me. Yet he'd soothed me, reluctantly telling me what I needed to hear. He wanted me. Only me. As confused as his words left me, I also felt comforted.

But where did we go from here? A feeling of unease settled in my stomach as I considered my options. While I could admit that I was beginning to see him in different light, it didn't change who he was, or rather, who he had been. There were moments when I thought I saw glimpses of another Bennett Ryan, but they

would disappear just as quickly.

I frowned, more confused than ever and still no closer to an answer, and stepped under the warm spray. Closing my eyes, I sighed, feeling a bit of the tension slip from my body. My mind, however, wasn't so easy to calm. No matter what I did, I couldn't see how this could work. We couldn't go back, but I didn't see how this could move forward either. The sex was… indescribable. Beyond anything I'd ever even imagined. But as strong as our physical connection was, could I live with just that?

Just thinking back to the way it had been last night caused my stomach to flutter. The things we said, the things we did. Even if our heads couldn't make sense of what was between us, our bodies knew.

From the first kiss I'd known I was lost. The feel of his lips on mine, his hands on my skin, was all it took for my will to crumble. Knowing that he'd felt as powerless to control himself as I had been, that he couldn't walk away either had been my undoing.

His kiss had been rough and frantic, each touch mirroring my own desperation. He never held back, always treating me as his equal, somehow knowing that's what I needed.

Then sometime during the night, it changed. Lines were crossed and walls were broken, and I didn't think they could ever be restored. He was not the asshole boss I had grown accustomed to.

Something flickered and I could see the man his father respected, the man I had *expected* to meet ten months ago. The same raging passion that seemed to burn whenever we were together still consumed us, but there was something else too.

Gone were Mr. Ryan and Ms. Mills. We were Bennett and Chloe, and I couldn't believe how right and real it felt. I'd never felt physically closer to another person in my life. He'd been tender and gentle, and we'd teased and just enjoyed each other for the first time. He had left me feeling… worshiped.

Without realizing it, my hand had drifted to my breast, where my fingers began to tease my tender nipple. Moaning softly, I remembered the sounds as he came, the wicked things he whispered into my ear, and the force of him thrusting in and out of me.

I closed my eyes, feeling the hot water rain over my skin as my hand slid down my stomach to my heated flesh. I was already slick and I bit my lip, and groaning slightly as my finger circled the sensitive skin.

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I gasped when a pair of strong arms encircled me and a large hand covered mine. “How about if you let me help you with that?” he whispered huskily into my ear. A loud sigh left my lips and I leaned into him, letting my head fall back against his chest.

“Just what were you thinking about in here?” He placed a small kiss against my wet hair and used his nose to tilt my head slightly, giving him access to my neck.

“You,” I said, my voice breathy. “Last night.”

“Mmmmm.” His soft moan vibrated against my skin as he began moving our hands slowly, our joined fingers teasing my clit. “I was thinking about that too. Can you feel what you do to me?” He bent slightly and his erection slipped between my legs. “Did I do this to you, Chloe?” He slid our hands lower and brushed against my entrance, feeling the slick moisture there.

“Oh God, Bennett,” I sighed quietly. I didn’t know what felt better, our hands on my skin or the sound of his silky voice saying my name.

“Fuck, I love it when you say my name.” His hips began to rock, causing his cock to slide back and forth against me. “God, Chloe.”

I groaned as he positioned our hands, causing each of us to slip a finger inside of me. “Do you feel that? How hot and wet you are?” He pushed us further inside and the moment was so intense that I swayed slightly. His free arm gripped me beneath my breasts, holding me to him while his thumb grazed the underside of my nipple. “Does that feel good, baby? I fucking love being inside of you.”

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He slid us deeper and began to pump in and out. “Mmm…Yes, Bennett…Oh fuck…that feels so good.” My voice was weak and breathless as the pleasure threatened to overwhelm me. The things this man did to me left me wanton and unashamed. I could never seem to get enough.

Our wet bodies slid easily against each other, and I threw my head back against his shoulder, moaning loudly as my climax neared. Lifting my free arm to his hair, I turned my head and pulled him down into a deep kiss. He moaned into my mouth and I knew he was enjoying this as much as I was.

“Do you want to come, Chloe?”

“Fuck, yes,” I was becoming desperate, the pressure was building and I needed more. I groaned at the loss of his touch as he brought our intertwined finger to his lips, and slowly slipped them into his mouth. It was the sexiest thing I’d ever seen, and I couldn’t help the sound of longing that escaped me.

“I could taste you every day for the rest of my life and never get tired of it. Did you know that, Chloe?”

I tried to form a coherent thought, but all sense seemed to have left me.

He placed his fingers at my mouth and ran them across my lips. I flicked my tongue out and his eyes darkened. “You are such a naughty girl.” Turning me to face him, he pushed me roughly against the cool marble wall and placed my hands over my head. “*Don’t move*,” he said sternly.

He began placing kisses down my neck and across my shoulders, his rough beard brushing against my skin. Working down to my breasts, I inhaled sharply as he held them both in his palms, lifting them gently while looking in my eyes. His thumbs grazed my nipples, and my eyes closed in pleasure.

I felt his hot breath fan over my nipple as he spoke, causing it to harden even more. “Tell me you don’t want me to stop.” He took it into his mouth and I bit my lip hard to keep from crying out. “Don’t be stubborn, Chloe,” he whispered against my skin as he moved to the other breast. “Tell me you don’t want me to stop, and I won’t.”

He began sucking, taking more of me into his mouth, and I couldn’t hold back anymore. “Don’t stop,” I whispered.

“What was that?” His lips moved down between my breasts and continued on a trail to my navel.

“I said don’t stop.” I was frantic, my body aching to feel release. He’d brought me to the edge only to pull back. I needed him, and right now I’d do anything, say anything he asked.

“Who does this to you, Chloe?”

“You do. Only you, Bennett.”

Standing up, he kissed me slowly and whispered into my mouth, “Only me.”

His hand slid down my body and lifted my leg, bringing it up against him. Looking down at our bodies, I couldn’t stop the moan as I saw his cock, hard and waiting, nestled between us. My eyes skimmed his body.

He was so perfect.

Sliding my hands from the wall, I let my fingers trace across his chest and down his abs. He shuddered slightly as I moved across the hardened muscles to his hips, where I froze. Was that-was that a tattoo?

“What-?” I stopped, stunned. I could barely form the words. Pushing him away slightly, I looked up to meet his eyes briefly before returning them to the

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mark. Right below his hip bone was a circle of elegant script written in French. How the fuck had I missed that? I thought back briefly to all the times we'd been together. We'd always been rushed, or in the dark, or in a state of semi-undress. He must have noticed my puzzled expression.

"It's a tattoo," he said humorously.

"I know it's a tattoo, but-" I was having a difficult time thinking at this point. "How…what does…what does it say?" I couldn't believe he had a tattoo. *Mr. Serious had a fucking tattoo and it was the sexiest thing I'd ever seen.* Another piece of the man I thought I knew fell away.

"Je ne regrette rien."

My eyes flew to him, a wave of pure lust spreading across every inch of my body. "What did you say?"

He definitely smirked. "*Je ne regrette rien*." He spoke each word slowly, emphasizing each and every syllable. My head fell back, my eyes closing as I let the words wash over me. That had to be the sexiest fucking thing I'd ever heard. Between that and the tattoo, I was going to spontaneously combust.

"*Fuck*. Say it again," I whimpered.

He moved closer, his breath hot in my ear and whispered it again. "*Je ne regrette rien*. Do you like that, Chloe?" He moved to press against me, pulling my leg higher on his hip.

I nodded. "Say something else." My breasts were heaving with each labored breath, my sensitive nipples grazing against the fine hair that covered his chest.

Bending slightly, his hands grasped my ass and lifted me, allowing me to wrap my legs around him.

He held me tightly, pressed against the wall, his words low and forceful in my ear, "Tu es faite pour moi." I couldn't wait anymore.

"Fuck me, Bennett." He didn't hesitate, and in one forceful push he was buried inside of me. I cried out, the sound echoing off the marble.

"Chloe, Chloe," His voice was strained and gravelly as he began thrusting into me. "Tu es faite pour moi." Kissing my hair gently he continued to murmur those words over and over in my ear.

His movements were smooth and forceful, each one causing me to slide up and then down the slick wall. I gasped into his mouth as the feeling threatened to overtake me.

"Oh fuck, Chloe…I can't…please…I won't last long." Hearing his voice so

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desperate and out of control only intensified my need for him. Everything seemed to disappear, the sound of the shower, the cool of the marble against my back. The only thing in this moment was this beautiful man and the incredible things he was making me feel.

Laying my head on his shoulder, I closed my eyes, focusing on the delicious feeling beginning to spread throughout my body. I was so close, teetering right on the edge. Reaching between us, my fingers found my clit and I began to rub it slowly.

Tilting his head, he looked down at my hand and swore. “Oh fuck,” His voice was desperate, his breath coming out in deep pants. “Touch yourself, baby. Oh Chloe, just like that. Let me see you.” His words were all I needed, and with one last brush of my fingers, I felt my orgasm overtake me.

I came hard, clenching around him, my nails digging into his back. He cried out loudly, his body seizing as he came inside me. My whole body shook in the aftermath, tiny tremors continuing even as my orgasm faded. I clung to him as he stilled, his body sinking against mine. He kissed my shoulder and my neck before placing a single kiss to my lips. Our eyes met briefly, and then he let me slide down his body.

Gripping the shower wall for support, he bent slightly, trying to catch his breath. “Holy shit,” he exhaled in a heavy breath.

I nodded. I couldn’t agree more. Standing opposite each other, the spray from the shower cascading between us, I couldn’t look away. I could feel every thought I ever had that the next time would be less powerful, that our connection would somehow be broken, melt away. It never had been and never would be. It would always be stronger and better than the last. As I gazed at him, it became clear to me that when this ended, it would hurt.

Fear gripped my heart and the panic from earlier returned, bringing an uncomfortable silence with it.

“We probably need to get ready,” I said abruptly, trying to ease the tension.

“Okay.” He looked confused for a moment before speaking. “I don’t have any clothes in here. I don’t even know where my room is.” I fought a blush as I remembered how quickly everything had happened last night.

“Right, um… I’ll… just use your key and go get you something.” I tried to avoid his eyes, the situation becoming more and more awkward by the moment.

“Okay. I’ll just let you finish up in here.” He continued to look at me for a moment before nodding his head and stepping out of the shower. I tried not to

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watch him as he pulled a towel from the rack and wrapped it around himself, but of course, I failed.

As soon as he shut the door, I slumped against the shower wall. What the hell was I doing? *Get a hold of yourself, Chloe!* Okay, I just needed to put some of the boundaries back in place. The first being, no more calling him Bennett. My stomach fluttered slightly as I thought of his name and I realized that might be harder than I thought. Fucking traitor body.

I finished up quickly and wrapped a towel around myself, wishing that I would have had the sense to bring some clothing in with me. With a deep breath I opened the door and stepped out.

He was sitting on the bed, and his eyes rose to meet mine as I entered the room.

"I just need…" I trailed off, motioning to my bag. He nodded but made no move to speak. I was usually never self conscious about my body. But standing here in nothing but a towel, knowing that he was watching me, left me feeling uncharacteristically uncomfortable.

Grabbing a few things, I rushed by him, not stopping till I was safely behind the bathroom door. I dressed quicker than I thought possible, deciding I would pull my hair back and finish the rest later.

Grabbing the key cards from the counter, I returned to the bedroom.

He hadn't moved. Sitting on the edge of the bed with his elbows resting on his thighs, he appeared lost in thought. What was he thinking? All morning I had been a nervous wreck, my emotions shifting wildly from one extreme to the other; but he seemed so…calm. So *sure*. But what was he sure of?

What had he decided?

"Do you have anything in particular you want me to bring you?"

Lifting his head, he looked slightly surprised, as if the thought hadn't occurred to him. Could this get anymore awkward? "Um…I have a speech to give today right?" I nodded, relieved at the realization that I wouldn't have to be next to him the entire day. "Whatever you pick will be fine."

"Sure…I'll be back." Spinning quickly, I all but sprinted out of the room, stopping to breathe only after I'd closed the door behind me. I was so fucked.

It only took me a second to locate his room; it was on the same floor and just a few doors down from mine. His bags were already there, and I paused briefly realizing I would have to go through his luggage.

Lifting the largest one and placing it on the bed, I opened it. His scent hit me and almost knocked me off my feet. Picking up one of his shirts I held it to my face, inhaling the delicious scent that drove me insane. *No, there was nothing creepy about that.* I set it down at that thought and began fingering through the neatly packed iteMs. Everything about him was so neat and organized, and it made me wonder what his home looked like.

I'd never thought about it much, but I suddenly wondered if I would ever see it, if I would ever see his bed. I paused as I realized that I wanted to. Would *he* want me to?

It struck me that I was stalling and I continued searching through his clothes before finally settling on a beautiful charcoal grey Dior suit, white dress shirt, silk black tie, socks and shoes.

Putting everything back where it belonged, I gathered up his clothing and headed for my room. I was unable to stifle my nervous laughter as I walked down the hall and shook my head from the sheer absurdity of the situation. Thankfully, I'd managed to compose myself somewhat as I reached my door. Placing my key in the card slot, I'd made it two steps inside before I froze.

He stood in front of the open window, awash in morning sunlight. Each beautiful line of his chiseled form was accentuated in perfect detail by the shadows cast across his body. The towel hung indecently low on his hips, and there poking out just above it, was the tattoo.

"See something you like?" My attention was reluctantly brought back to his face at the amused sound of his voice. Embarrassed that I had basically been caught ogling him, I stammered as I tried to find an intelligent response.

"I, uh…" My eyes drifted back down to his hip as I tried to clear my head. This was not going well.

"I said, see something you like?" He crossed the room, stopping just in front of me, a satisfied smirk on his beautiful cocky face.

"What? Um, no," I lied, quickly trying to come up with something. "I was just, thinking about something."

"And what exactly where you thinking about?" His hand reached out, moving a piece of my still damp hair behind my ear. Just that simple touch caused my stomach to jump.

"That we have a schedule to keep."

He moved a step closer. "Why don't I believe you?"

“Because you’re self-absorbed?” I taunted, meeting his gaze. He quirked an eyebrow and watched me for a moment before taking his clothing from my hands.

“Is that so?” I didn’t miss the teasing tone of his voice. Backing up he placed the items on the bed and looked at me. Before I could move, he pulled the towel from his hips and tossed it to the bed. *Sweet Mother of God.* If there was a finer specimen of man on this earth, I’d pay big money to see it.

Picking up his dress shirt, he slid his arms into it and stopped, looking at me. “Didn’t you just say we had a schedule to keep?” He questioned, eyeing me humorously. “Unless of course, you see something you like.”

Son of a- I narrowed my eyes, and turned quickly, returning to the bathroom to finish getting ready for the day.

As I dried my hair, I couldn’t get past the unsettling feeling that he wanted to say something. What would he tell me? What would I find when I opened the door? An unfamiliar ache began to build in my chest and I didn’t understand it. Was I worried he would want to leave or stay?

Make-up and hair done, I knew it was time to face the music. Stepping into the bedroom, I saw he was dressed and waiting. He stood with his back to me, looking out the large window. Hearing me enter he turned, a pensive expression on his face.

Never leaving my eyes, he moved towards me, my heart beating wildly in my chest. He placed his warm hands on my face and looked at me, an emotion in his eyes I’d never seen before.

“I don’t want to walk out that door, and lose what we found in this room.”

His simple words rocked me. He wasn’t declaring, he wasn’t promising, yet he said everything I didn’t know I felt.

I tried to speak, but knew there weren’t any words that could express the thoughts and feelings running through me. Letting out a shaky breath I brought my hands to his chest and nodded.

Smiling softly, he nodded. “We can talk later. Ready to go?”

“Yeah.” I said quietly. Not able to keep from smiling in return.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

TWELVE – Seattle Nights

With a contented sigh, I pressed my face deeper into the pillow. It smelled so fucking good. It was a smell I knew, a smell I loved. Like oranges and the white flowers that grew outside my window in Paris.

It used to be a smell that tortured me; I'd try and block it out, move away. Now, I breathed it in greedily, searched it out, and memorized it. I let it wash over me and it made me smile. It was Chloe.

I reached out, searching for soft curves and warm skin, but found nothing but tangled sheets. Lifting my head, I opened an eye and glared at the empty spot next to me. Where was she?

Pushing up off my stomach, I rolled over and glanced around the room. *Her room*. This was the second time I'd awoken here, and it was the second time I'd been alone. I sat up and smiled at the scene in front of me. The curtains were billowing in the light breeze and torn, haphazardly discarded clothing lay strewn across the floor and furniture. We'd obviously been in a hurry.

I'd opened my eyes yesterday morning and been confused. Confused about where I was, how I'd gotten there, and why I'd been naked. The sheets had smelled like her and it had only fueled the dream I was having. As the sound of the shower brought me out of sleep, it had only taken me a minute to realize it wasn't a dream.

When she'd picked me up from the airport, I never would have imagined how the night would end. It had been the most incredible night I'd ever spent with a woman, until last night that is.

Each time was better than the time before. Being with her was the easiest thing in the world. I didn't need to think; my body took over for me and we fit together like we were made to move that way. It had never been like that before, ever. *Tu es faite pour moi. "You were made for me."*

Feeling that familiar pull to find her, I stood up and retrieved my boxers from the chair next to the bed. I'd never brought any extra clothing with me, choosing instead to keep my bags in my own room.

To bring them here would require some sort of thought or admittance of what was going on, something we had yet to do. I knew we needed to talk about this, I'd even said as much, but every time the opportunity presented itself, I couldn't do it. If I didn't know how I felt about this, how could I explain it to her?

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Moving quietly towards the open French door, I stopped at the sight before me. Chloe stood on the private balcony, looking down at the city below, seemingly lost in thought. She looked absolutely beautiful. It was beginning to rain, currently amounting to only a light mist. Tiny drops had gathered in her dark hair, catching errant rays of sunlight that managed to make their way through the building clouds. My eyes traveled hungrily down her body, noting the way the pale pink satin of her robe fluttered around her long legs in the breeze.

When she tilted her head slightly, I saw that she looked troubled and I wondered what she was thinking about. Was she regretting what had happened? I'd found myself going over and over the different ways this could play out until I'd been forced to put it out of my mind. I didn't want to focus on any of that now. We had so little time left to be together this way. We were going home tomorrow, and eventually this little bubble of intimacy we'd created would burst. I didn't want to waste a moment of that time thinking of what was to come.

Shaking my head to clear my thoughts, I opened the door and stepped out. If she heard me, she didn't react. The air was heavy and damp, the smell of wet pavement rising up to meet me. The breeze was cool, but not at all unpleasant against my bare skin. Walking up behind her, I startled her slightly as I slid my arms around her waist. Nothing was said as she leaned back against my chest and I buried my face into her hair, placing soft kisses along the back of her neck.

"You weren't there," I whispered softly against her ear.

"I know." She didn't offer anything else, and I didn't ask. Her head tilted to the side, and my lips moved down along her shoulder, moving under the collar of her robe. My hand slipped up her ribs and cupped her breast lightly, my thumb grazing over her hardened nipple. She was warm and perfect in my palm and I let my thumb trace back and forth, pulling her robe open a bit more with each pass.

"You're so beautiful," I said as my hand slipped underneath the satin fabric. Her head fell to her shoulder and a soft sigh escaped her lips as I pulled her closer to me.

"You make me feel that way," she said quietly. Her words were simple, and yet the meaning behind them stilled my exploration of her skin for a moment. What was the feeling those words evoked in me? Surprise? Pride? I wasn't sure, but warmth spread across my skin and I knew I wanted to be the one to make her feel that way.

Minutes passed this way as we stood together, hidden from the world. My

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hands and mouth explored her body as she rocked back against me. I'd never enjoyed this part of being with a woman so much before. As much as there was to be said about the frantic rush for our bodies to come together, the past two days had also taught us to slow down. We'd explored every inch of each other, lingering for hours in the shower, staying up each night learning what the other liked. I'd never gotten so little sleep in my life, and yet I'd also never felt more exhilarated.

I knew exactly where she liked to be touched, when I needed to ask and when she wanted me to just take. I knew every spot that made her sigh, knew that she thought my tattoo was the sexiest thing she'd ever seen, and that if I spoke French to her she'd come undone.

She had discovered where to kiss to drive me insane, how I liked to be stroked and that I needed to hear my name when she came. No woman had ever seemed so eager to please me before, and no one had ever even come close.

The need to take her was growing and I turned her slowly to face me. I groaned as her bare breasts pressed against my chest through the opening in her robe, and brought my hand up to thread into her slightly damp hair. Pulling her to me, I brushed my mouth slowly against hers, reveling in the silkiness and warmth of her lips against mine. I didn't deepen the kiss, enjoying the way she sighed between my slightly parted lips and let me lead her. My eyes never left hers as we shared this moment and I felt the electricity course between us, burning where our bodies touched. My hand slid down, slipping along the silky material until I cupped her ass, bringing her more fully against me. Her breath caught as she felt my hardened cock press against her, only two thin layers of fabric separating us.

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"I need to feel you," I whispered into her mouth. "Let me."

"We have somewhere to be," she protested quietly, and I knew she was right. "We can't sneak off today." I pouted slightly against her lips, teasing her.

"Please." I'd never been like this before, so willing to toss aside my responsibilities to appease my desires. It was a fact that scared me, but just like so many other thoughts this week, I pushed it aside.

"Trust me, this won't take long." My mouth moved down her neck and I smiled as she laughed, feeling the vibration against my lips. Pride swelled inside of me as I realized that I was the one who had elicited that beautiful sound from her.

"Well when you put it that way-" I cut off her words with my mouth as I

picked her up around the waist, and raced inside. She squealed with laughter as I threw her on the bed and within seconds I was deep inside her. We were going to be late again.

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Tapping my pencil on the empty note pad in front of me, I couldn't take my eyes off the woman sitting across the table.

We'd been sitting through a seminar on anticipating market changes for two hours and I hadn't heard a single word. Normally, this was a subject that I would have had no trouble focusing on. My notebook and head would be full of exciting ideas and new concepts I couldn't wait to explore.

Today, and everyday now for that matter, the only thing that held any interest for me was Chloe. *Chloe.*

It still seemed strange to *think* her name let alone say it. We had yet to use our first names outside of her hotel room, a fact I knew was not lost on either of us. That room had become a sanctuary of sorts, the only place where we truly let ourselves be together. Yesterday morning, I'd seen the distance growing between us as we dressed and I couldn't let it happen. Without thinking it through, I had pulled her to me, and said the first words that came into my head.

"I don't want to walk out that door and lose what we found in this room." I hadn't known how true they were until I had said them aloud. Inside these walls, we could be together. No words were said in anger, no one tried to have the last word, and the outside world seemed to disappear. I didn't want to lose that.

I'd given myself permission to pursue this, thinking it would be easy to keep it separated from myself.

But within minutes of waking up I'd known that wasn't going to work. As much as I tried to deny it, I could feel myself becoming more and more attached to her with every minute we spent together. I kept waiting for the moment I felt less drawn to her, knowing that sooner or later she would say or do something that would finally make my body listen to reason; it *never came*.

Looking back towards the speaker, I tried unsuccessfully once again to redirect my thoughts to something productive.

I saw her shift in my peripheral vision and instinctively, I turned to look at her again. Our eyes met across the table and every other sound in the room blended together, floating around me but never breaking into my consciousness. Without thinking, my body leaned towards her slightly as she did the same. We continued to stare across the table at each other, the familiar pull I felt when I was near her
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drawing me forward.

A cell phone ringing somewhere behind me broke me from my trance, causing me to look away.

Quickly sitting back in my chair, I was shocked to see how far I was actually leaning towards her.

Clearing my throat I looked around and stopped dead as a pair of unfamiliar eyes met mine.

This stranger had no idea who we were, or that Chloe worked for me; he'd only glanced at us and quickly looked away. In that moment, every fear and ounce of guilt I'd been suppressing for the last few weeks hit me. I was suddenly overwhelmed with disappointment in my behavior. I was risking my career, my reputation, my family's company, and all because I couldn't control myself around her.

Without another glance in her direction, I turned in my chair towards the front, now giving the speaker my full attention. I needed to take a step back and gain some perspective, for both our sakes.

The session went on and I could sense her watching me, no doubt wondering about the sudden change in my demeanor. But it's not like I could explain my epiphany in the middle of a meeting so I forced myself to stare ahead. About an hour later, they released us for the day and we stood, making our way through the crowd and out of the large auditorium. The air between us was tense as we stepped out into the bright atrium level of the convention center.

I couldn't spend the night with her again and as much as it killed me to do it, I needed to put some distance between us. Pulling her to the side, I had just opened my mouth to speak when a group of woman approached her.

"Chloe!" An attractive woman about her age grabbed her, pulling her into an excited hug.

"There you are! We're all going out tonight and want you to come." I watched as the indecision crossed her face and I knew her dilemma; she thought we'd be spending tonight the way we'd spent every night so far. And why wouldn't she? I'd meant everything I'd said, but out here in the bright light of the real world I didn't know if that was possible anymore. The thought of what I was about to do made me sick.

"Ms. Mills." Her eyes flew to mine, wide and hopeful, and it took everything I had to continue. "I have a dinner meeting tonight, so I'll just meet you in the morning before we head to the airport. You should go out and have fun with your

friends.” Her face fell almost instantly and an unfamiliar pain clenched my chest. I didn’t want to be the one who made her look that way. I wanted to make her laugh again, to see her smile.

“Oh…okay. Of course, Mr. Ryan. I’ll just see you tomorrow then.” Our eyes held for a moment and although she seemed cool and collected, I could see the pain there. Every part of me was aching to reach out to her, to take the hurt from her eyes. But I couldn’t.

The group of women around her squealed in excitement and immediately began making plans to drive her back to the hotel and wait while she dressed. I nodded to her and quickly turned. I had to get away.

The short drive was quiet and lonely, with only my jumbled thoughts to keep me company. I couldn’t believe a day that had begun so perfectly had ended this way. I’d known the real world would reappear eventually, and I couldn’t avoid it forever. I just hadn’t known it would affect me so strongly when it happened.

Reaching the hotel, I made my way through the large lobby to the elevator, lost in thought. I’d fucked up, in more ways than I could even count; with work, my responsibilities and with Chloe. I’d hurt her.

I couldn’t believe how much that realization bothered me.

“Mr. Ryan! Hold the elevator!” Turning around I saw the group from the convention center walking quickly towards me with Chloe in the center. I stood back and held open the door and motioned for them to enter ahead of me.

“Ladies,” I said politely, entering only after they’d all stepped inside. My eyes met hers across the elevator briefly before she looked away.

“Chloe, what did you pack?” An attractive brunette in the group asked her. “There is this amazing club downtown that we’re going to after dinner, and I know you brought something hot.”

“Um, I don’t really feel like clubbing, Melissa,” she said to the girl and it didn’t escape my attention that she was avoiding my eyes.

“What! Chloe, we always go! It’s tradition…” numerous protests rang out from the group.

“I know, I know. But I’m really tired. I don’t feel like dancing tonight.” The brunette looked at her strangely and I could see Chloe growing uncomfortable under the scrutiny.

“How can you be tired? You’ve gone back to your room early every night. I haven’t seen you once outside of the workshops all week. What on earth have

you been doing?" I'd been trying to remain inconspicuous by looking down at the floor, but couldn't resist glancing at her.

Our eyes met across the lift and I knew her thoughts mirrored my own. I imagined every moment of not sleeping, of holding her in my arms and touching every inch of her skin. Even with the invisible wall I had put between us, I could still read her.

The elevator dinged, saving her from answering and they all filed out. Chloe didn't meet my eyes again. I watched as they headed down the hall, a torrent of different female conversations about tonight's plans surrounding them. I rubbed my chest as the unfamiliar ache returned and watched her disappear behind the door.

Entering my own room, I ran my hands through my hair and looked around, cursing as my perfectly made bed mocked me. I hadn't been sleeping in it, but I'd been pulling back the blankets to make it appear that it had been used. Just one more lie to add to the list.

Shaking my head, I threw my keys and wallet on the dresser and headed for the shower. As I stepped under the warm spray, I was instantly reminded that this was the first time I had even used my bathroom. Unable or unwilling to resist, I thought back to the showers we had shared. I'd never spoken French to any other woman besides Rachel, and it had never gotten that kind of response. I'd taken to saying different things to Chloe, knowing she didn't understand a word of it, but loving how she reacted. Sometimes they were filthy, sometimes they were tender, but they always left us both trembling.

FROM LOVE

I dressed quickly and was heading for the door when I remembered a call I needed to make. Chloe had mentioned that our hotel was known for its amazing rooftop pool and was disappointed upon hearing it was closed. My mind had instantly jumped to an image of the two of us together in the warm water, and I had quickly offered to arrange for her to use it.

I frowned as I realized that wouldn't happen now, but I could at least make sure *she* would enjoy herself. It only took a quick phone call and a bit of monetary persuasion for the manager to agree to give her unrestricted access. After a few minutes, things were arranged and he promised to send the gate keys up to her room.

My meeting was at a popular sushi restaurant near the hotel and as I offered my keys to the valet driver, I mentally prepared myself to deal with business. If I was going to endure the self imposed torture of being away from her, then I'd damn well better make sure it was worth it.

I managed to put on a believable front, chiming in when necessary, and impressing my colleagues with the upcoming ventures planned for Ryan Inc. I'd even run into a former classmate from NYU who was attending the conference and considering a move to Chicago. But despite all these things going on around me, I couldn't get her out of my head. All I could think about was where she was and what she was doing.

Stepping into the darkened room at the end of the night, I removed my jacket and turned on the small lamp near the bed before sitting. The room was quiet and lonely, only amplifying the ache in my chest.

I chelled my phone and saw that I had two missed calls from my brother. *Great*. Normally, I would have already spoken to my father and brother several times this week, excitedly telling him of the latest trends and potential clients I'd met. So far, I hadn't talked to either of them once. I'd been afraid they would see right through me, and with a heavy sigh, I realized I was probably right.

It was after eleven and I wondered if she was still with her friends. Maybe she had decided to go to a club after all. Was she dancing with someone? Laughing and having fun? Was she in her room? Maybe she was lying there thinking about me the same way I was thinking about her.

I stood to make my way to my luggage when a small envelope next to the door caught my eye.

Curiously, I walked over to retrieve it. An access card. The hotel must have sent one to my room as well. An image of the pool she had so excitedly described to me appeared in my head. Could she still be up there swimming? Before I gave myself a moment to change my mind, I was out the door and in the elevator; pressing the button that would take me to the roof.

The elevator opened and I passed a large sign on an easel stating that the pool was closed. I quickly made my way across the elegant marbled floor and placed my key in the slot on the wrought iron gate leading to the outdoor area.

The moment it opened, I was overcome with the sounds and smells of the Seattle night. The area before me was incredible. The entire roof had been transformed into an elegant patio. The floors were lined in warm teak; several massive trees set in flower filled planters dotted the space, their branches swaying in the light breeze. Large white cabanas stretched along the edges of the roof and the only illumination came from rows of raised fire pits, casting everything in a warm, flickering glow.

I walked slowly towards the large pool and had a perfect view of the beautiful

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woman swimming laps in the luminescent blue water. I felt slightly guilty for watching her without her knowledge and decided to take a seat in one of the large chaises set under the cabanas. I needed to talk to her, and knew it couldn't wait.

The air was slightly cool, but the large heaters set along the patios edge kept the chill away for the most part. From where I sat, I could see her as she neared the opposite side, kicking off the edge to continue back. My eyes were split between the beauty of the woman swimming in the low light of the pool, and the twinkling lights of the city around us.

Leaning back in the chair, I closed my eyes, letting the sounds and atmosphere calm me. Soft music played from the hidden speakers, and if I listened closely I could pick up the murmured sound of the traffic below. The warm breeze blew across my face, rustling my hair and I found myself thinking of how perfect a place this would be to spend an evening with her. The thought hardly surprised me anymore.

The sound of rushing water caught my ear and I sat up, my breath catching at the site of her climbing out of the pool. The water ran off her body, her wet skin glimmering in the flickering light of the fire.

My body seemed propelled forward and I quickly rose from my chair, grabbing a thick white towel from a stack near the cabana.

She wore a tiny red and white string bikini that showed off every inch of her toned body and I swallowed hard as I neared her. I'd obviously seen her in much less, but the way the suit framed her soft curves had me struggling to remember the real reason for my being here.

Clearing my throat to alert her to my presence, I was met with a somber expression. She seemed surprised to see me, but there wasn't any intense emotion visible. My chest tightened again as a brief memory of her carefree laughter from this morning contrasted with the unattached look she wore now.

I offered her the towel and watched as she looked at it, waiting a moment before she reached out and took it.

"Thanks," she said, meeting my eyes again.

"I need to talk to you," I started, a strange sense of dread filling me. What if I was too late? What if she had grown tired of my indecision?

"Really? About what?" Her voice was flat and held a trace of annoyance as she walked past me towards the cabanas. She picked up a bottle of water she had on the table and took a long drink. I turned to follow her, still debating what it

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was that I wanted to say.

“About today. About this.”

“You don’t owe me anything.” Her voice was quiet but it echoed louder in my ears than if she would have screamed it. How could she think that? Did she really think I didn’t care for her? I watched the pain flicker across her face and I suddenly saw all the mistakes I’d made. I should have been honest, explained what I was going through. Instead I’d shut myself off from her again. After all the things we’d been through this week, I’d left without a reason, leaving her to think the worst. Panic swept over me as I watched her wrap the towel around her body and turn to leave… I couldn’t let her go.

“Of course I owe you,” I said, gripping her forearm lightly. “How could you not know that?” Her eyes searched mine, and I saw fear there. Was it possible that she was feeling this too? That she was as scared of losing me as I was of her?

“I should have told you…I saw someone watching us…and I just-” I ran my hands through my hair and turned away slightly, looking back at the pool. I had no idea how to word this and not hurt her.

“Oh.” Her voice was quiet and I turned to see her. Her head was down, a look of resigned understanding on her face.

“He wasn’t even looking at us, really. I just looked up and it made me feel-”

“Like you were doing something wrong,” she finished for me. She looked up finally and in that moment I really saw her. For the first time I saw what this had to be doing to her. I couldn’t believe what a phenomenal asshole I’d been. In all the time we’d been together, I’d never even once considered how she had been dealing with this.

Moving to her, I placed my hand on her chin, tilting her face to look at me. “Chloe, I’m sorry.” Her eyes closed briefly, and I wished so badly that I could know what she was thinking.

Sliding the tips of my fingers along her jaw, I moved my hand into her wet hair and pulled her to me.

Her body leaned into mine and I suppressed a groan as I felt her hard nipples graze my chest. My free hand moved to her neck and slipped across her shoulder and down her arm, my fingers gathering the wet drops as I went.

“I don’t know if I can do this. You…” Her voice trailed off quietly as her eyes closed and even though her words said one thing, she leaned further into my

touch. Did she mean tonight? Did she mean us?

A pain grew inside me at the thought of her ending this.

“I know what I want,” I said, looking into her eyes. “I want you, but I don’t know how to make it right.

To *have* you and make it right. Tell me how, Chloe.” Her eyes searched mine and I prayed she understood.

“I don’t know,” she whispered. Our faces moved closer, her lips hovering over mine, but never touching. “But I want it too.” The last words were spoken so softly, I felt them more than heard them.

My hand moved to the small of her back, feeling the way it curved gently and the way her skin responded to my touch. Her lips brushed against mine and I almost smiled at how the need only grew. The anticipation of being with her was almost as incredible as the actual thing. I loved that she could tease me back, make me so hard with wanting that I would beg if she asked.

I leaned in to close the distance between our mouths and she pulled back slightly, looking into my eyes.

“You know there are cameras up here, don’t you?”

“Not tonight,” I whispered. She sighed deeply and pressed her lips against mine. I groaned at the spark that shot through my body as our mouths finally met. Pulling away slightly, she ran her tongue along my bottom lip. I leaned in, nipping lightly before taking it into my mouth. In an instant my body was on fire.

My hands tightened in her hair and I was rewarded as her hands skimmed up my body, wrapping her fingers into mine. She pulled me roughly into her and I couldn’t help the way my body rocked into hers. Her skin was damp and wet against my clothing, the tiny pieces of fabric pressing against me.

“I want you,” she moaned as we pulled apart. The intensity and meaning of that statement sent a wave of lust over me. Seeing her lose herself in wanting me was something I knew I would never tire of.

“You have me.” Pulling back, she searched my eyes briefly; still twisting a piece of my hair between her fingers. The flickering flames around us danced in her eyes, casting her skin in a warm, amber glow. “You have me, Chloe.”

Rising up on her toes to reach me, she pressed her mouth roughly to mine. I leaned into her kiss, letting her take what she wanted. I let her lead and set the pace, losing myself in the feeling of giving up control.

Her hands moved down my chest and to my waist, pulling my shirt from my pants. I hardened even more at the thought of having her out here. I wanted to see her naked body in the moonlight; I wanted to feel the cool breeze across our skin. She undid the buttons one by one, until finally becoming impatient and ripping apart the final three. The buttons fell and bounced along the wooden floor and I smiled against her lips, loving that she could lose herself in wanting me as well.

She slipped her hands between my open shirt and I shuddered as her wet top came in contact with my bare skin. Sliding my hands up her back, I pulled on the thin red string holding her top on. My fingers brushed under the fabric and slid up, holding her breasts in my hand. The skin under her suit was cool and I cupped her gently, loving the way her nipples reacted against my palm.

“You’re so perfect,” I said between kisses.

“So are you.” I couldn’t help but smile at her words. It occurred to me that I’d never felt so many different emotions during sex before. I’d never felt so connected to a person that I was laid bare, feeling so open that I allowed each emotion to come to the surface.

Her lips left mine and she kissed along my jaw and up to my ear, causing my eyes to roll back into my head and a low feral groan to escape my chest. My fingers moved to the tie around her neck and quickly pulled it apart, letting it fall from her body. Pulling away slightly, I watched my hands. I cradled her beautiful breasts in my palms, lifting them and feeling their weight. I rolled her nipples between my fingers and watched they way they responded, growing harder under my touch. Her eyes closed and her head fell to the side, as I touched and explored the soft skin.

Bringing my mouth to her, I lost myself in the sensation of her warm skin against my lips and the feel of her firm nipples against my tongue. Her hands threaded roughly in my hair, guiding me to where she wanted me most.

I felt my shirt being slipped from my shoulders and I paused, allowing it to fall to the ground. Placing her hands on either side of my face, she pulled my mouth to hers, her tongue slipping quickly inside.

She pushed me back, stopping only when my legs met the chaise behind me. I sank into the plush cushions, moaning as she straddled my lap.

The back of the chair was reclined slightly, giving me the perfect vantage point to watch her, and I fought to keep my eyes from closing as her warm mouth trailed kisses across my jaw and down my neck. I watched as her hands

moved in unison across my chest and further down, stopping to release my belt. Her fingers grazed my straining cock through the fabric of my pants, and I gasped loudly; my hips lifting involuntarily to meet her. I felt her laugh against my chest and raised my head see her.

Her tongue darted out to encircle my nipple, and I gasped at both the sight and the feeling that jolted through me.

My head fell back against the cushion, my hands tangling into her hair. I closed my eyes, giving myself over to the intense feelings coursing through my body. I reacted instantly to her every touch, my muscles clenching and my breath catching as she explored. I felt her tug on my pants and I lifted my hips slightly, letting her pull them and my boxers down my body. I kicked them off, letting them fall to the ground and moaning as the cool air swept across my throbbing cock.

Kissing her way back up my body, her cool hair brushed against my warm skin. My breath caught as she looked at me and slowly circled her tongue around my tattoo. “Oh fuck, baby.” My voice was strained and hoarse and it took all my willpower not to lead her hot mouth to my aching cock.

Pulling her up my body, I brought her lips to mine, my hands eagerly running up and down her sides.

The backs of my fingers skimmed the underside of her breasts and I smiled against her lips as I felt a shiver run through her.

My hands continued on a path down her body, stopping on her hips. My fingers brushed the soft flesh before tugging on the strings to her suit. I felt the fabric give way and I tossed it unceremoniously to the floor.

Our eyes met and the moment was so surreal, I wanted to lock it away in my mind forever. My hands rested on her thighs, my thumbs tracing small circles on her skin. Slowly I sat up, our faces only inches apart. She watched me as I closed the distance between us and softly placed my lips against hers. Leaning into me she deepened the kiss and brought her hands up to my neck.

Her body rocked against mine instinctively and I couldn’t suppress the moan as her slick heat slipped across my cock. Reaching between us, she wrapped her warm hand around me and a low moan escaped my lips.

“Oh, Chloe.” My head fell to her shoulder and I brought my hands to rest on her hips. Knowing what I wanted, she lifted her body and allowed me to position her. With an agonizing slowness, she lowered herself onto me. Her hands twisted into my hair and she sighed deeply as she began rocking her hips.

I groaned helplessly as she shifted and I slid further inside of her.

“Lay back, Bennett,” she said breathlessly against my hair, and I felt her push against my chest.

Leaning back against the cushions, I groaned at the sight before me.

“Fuck, Chloe. You look so beautiful.” She drew her nails down my chest and along my abs, and I hissed at the delicious mixture of pleasure and pain. Slowly she lifted one long leg and placed her foot against my shoulder.

“God, baby. What are you doing?” I moaned, feeling her muscles move around me. Arching her other leg she brought it up the same way, letting it to rest next to my head. The movement shifted her weight to where we were joined and my entire body shuddered from the sheer intensity of being so deep within her.

She began rocking her hips, pushing off my body for leverage. Her movements were slow and timed perfectly to the rhythmic beat floating from the speakers. She placed her palms behind her, resting on my thighs and let her head fall back, the damp tips of her hair brushing along my legs only adding to the sensation. I’d never felt anything like it, each swivel of her hips sent another surge of pleasure through me and I was struggling to find control.

I watched in awe as she moved herself on me, the way her hips rocked and swiveled to the music, the way her breasts jutted forward, bouncing lightly with each movement.

My hands moved to slide up and down her legs as my eyes roamed her body, stopping on where we were connected. It was too much, seeing her, feeling her, the emotions swirling inside of me.

I let my head fall back; my eyes closed tight and tried to focus on something besides the friction of my cock inside of her. I felt the breeze cool my damp skin, the crackling sound of the fire just outside the cabana, the distant hum of the traffic below, the way my name fell softly from her lips.

A moment of clarity began to dawn, that this woman had somehow managed to become the focus of my entire universe. Without her I didn’t know how I could exist. She broke through the walls I had built, and I didn’t want them back up. I wanted to let her in, to keep her with me, to love her. An emotion so powerful gripped my chest it took my breath away. I was falling in love with her.

Suddenly I needed to hold her, to wrap myself around her and prove that this was real. Kissing each leg softly before moving them, I sat and pulled her to me. I wrapped my arms around her waist and held her, burying my face against her

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breasts. She was here.

“Bennett,” she said softly, bringing her arms and legs around me.

“Oh God, Chloe,” I whispered, my voice desperate against her skin. “I need you.”

I pulled her down more firmly against me and lifted my hips to meet her. Bringing my hand to cup her face, I kissed her deeply, loving the way she moaned into my mouth. Her movements were becoming more frantic and I reached between us, stroking, feeling myself inside of her.

She arched against me and gasped as I rubbed her gently. “Say something, Bennett.” Bringing my mouth to her ear, I brushed back her sweaty hair and whispered.

“Je suis { toi.” Her head fell to the side and she moaned, her muscles beginning to tighten around me.

“Say it again.”

“Je suis { toi, Chloe.” I repeated the words over and over, realizing more each time how true they were. The sound of my own voice sounded strange to me, desperate and needful. The pressure built inside me, teetering, ready to explode. She cried out, her body falling apart in my arms and I felt my climax ripping through me. I emptied myself inside her, my body shaking and clinging to her like an anchor.

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With my eyes closed, my cheek against her chest, I felt her heart beat against my ear. I focused on it, letting it bring me down from the most intense experience of my life. Moments passed and a soft sob brought me from my thoughts. Looking up, her eyes are closed, silent tears falling down her cheeks.

“Chloe, baby what’s wrong? Did I hurt you?” The gripping fear choked my voice as I wiped her tears and kissed her eyes. Shaking her head she looked at me, a soft smile on her face. Without words I understood and pulled her to me, laying us both down along the chaise. From the table next to me I grabbed a thick cotton robe and placed it over us. The night had cooled and we trembled slightly, but didn’t move to leave.

Closing my eyes, I focused on her soft breathing, and the way her body felt against mine. The ache in my chest returned as I realized how far we’d come. I could barely believe I used to think I could live without her-that I could somehow deny the pull she had on me. But our bodies knew what our heads had been trying to fight. I realized there was no going back for me. I was falling and I didn’t know how to stop it.

Sweeping a piece of hair from her cheek, she looked up at me and I wondered if she felt it too. I leaned it to kiss her softly, enjoying the soft sigh that escaped her parted lips. Tomorrow we would get on a plane and head back to reality. I was terrified of what that meant but as she took my hand in hers, kissing it softly before entwining our fingers, I realized it didn't matter. I'd passed the point of no return and whether she wanted me or not, I was hers.

"Je suis { toi."

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THIRTEEN – JE SUIS À TOI

I kicked smoothly off the edge of the pool, my body gliding through the lower depths of the dimly lit water. I swam harder, pushing my body as far as it would take me, hoping the ache in my overworked muscles would be enough to distract me from the constant ache I felt in my chest. I needed to feel this. I needed the physical exertion to drive me into a dreamless sleep tonight. I needed to know that I would return to my room too exhausted to focus on the fact that I was alone, that I had opened my heart and finally acknowledged my feelings for him, only to have it thrown back.

Repeating the process on the other side, I plunged deeper, hoping to drown every bit of hurt I felt at his rejection. Everything had been so perfect, and I was still struggling to accept that he had essentially pulled away. I didn't know what had happened. One minute we were happy, as happy as we could have been given the situation, and the next…he was gone.

When we'd left our meeting, the eyes that looked back at me were not the soft, kind eyes I had come to know this week. He was cold and distant as he told me of the plans that would take up his evening.

I'd done my best to keep my surprise and hurt hidden, but on the inside I was struggling. What had changed? What had I done? This hurt, insecure girl was not the woman I prided myself on being. I knew then as he walked away from me that this was over.

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Breaking the surface, I moved to my back and let the warm water support my weight. I floated along the surface and attempted to let my mind clear for the moment as I watched the stars in the deep ebony sky above me. It was so perfect up here, and I found myself wishing once again that I had been able to share it with him.

For the first time since this morning, I thought back to what had happened and how it had felt to wake up in his arms. Within seconds of waking, I'd felt stirrings of the unwelcome panic begin to settle over me again and I'd climbed out of bed, needing some space before facing him. As I slipped on my robe and moved to the balcony I berated myself once more for not being brave enough to talk to him. Was I afraid I wouldn't like what he had to say? Maybe it was me. Maybe I was afraid to really look at my feelings. I knew that once I opened that door and finally acknowledged them, there would be no going back.

I'd been surprised to feel his arms around me, but not surprised at how right it felt. *Everything* with him felt right, and it only made the reality of our situation that much harder to accept. I had known going in that he was completely unavailable to me, and at the time it wasn't a problem. I never wanted more from him. I did now.

"You weren't there," he whispered between kisses along my neck.

"I know," I answered, wondering if the guilt I felt for being such a coward was betrayed by my voice.

There was no way I could tell him why. Why every single morning this week I'd crept out of bed, afraid to face him, afraid of what I might see when I looked at him lying next to me. I was grateful he didn't question, and I melted into his touch. His hands fit perfectly along my body, and I couldn't help the tiny moan that escaped as his thumbs brushed my nipple.

I let my eyes close as I remembered what was quite possibly the last time I would know him that way.

"You're so beautiful," he had said. I'd heard those words before, but never really known how powerful they could be. He made me *feel* beautiful. I'd never been so physically open with another person before, letting him explore every part of my body. He always looked at me with wonder and fascination, never allowing me to feel ashamed or self conscious. I hoped he knew how much that meant to me.

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Dragging my hands lazily over the waters surface, I remembered standing with him in the gentle rain, relishing in the feel of just being together. I thought of how his hands had moved along my body, slipping into my robe and caressing my bare skin. I leaned back into him, feeling him hard and warm against me. His need for me seemed to be almost as insatiable as my need for him. I knew there wasn't time. We couldn't keep pushing away our responsibilities to indulge this growing passion between us. Yet once again, I found myself unable to say no.

He'd thrown me playfully on to the bed, only taking enough time to part my robe before pushing himself inside of me. It was soft and teasing, so very different from how we usually were. He'd kissed my eyes, my nose, and my cheeks leaving no part of my body untouched. He'd whispered things to me I didn't understand, and yet they spoke to me as if I knew every word. I swore to myself right then that one day I would learn French. When we'd come together at the end, I knew that no matter where I looked, I would never find this again.

Deciding it was time to face reality, I moved to the edge of the pool and

climbed out, instantly thankful for all of the large heaters surrounding the patio. Startled by a throat clearing behind me, I turned; shocked to find he was there. He wanted to talk, to explain what had happened, that it was all a misunderstanding. He'd felt the same guilt and fear that I had.

Even as his fingertips ran along my jaw and his hand wrapped itself into my hair, I'd tried to hold back. I couldn't finish the words to tell him that I couldn't do this. I tried to fight the way my stomach fluttered as he touched me and how my heart ached when he said he wanted me.

"I know what I want," he'd said. "I want you, but I don't know how to make it right. To *have* you and make it right. Tell me how, Chloe." I gazed at him, seeing my own hopes and fears reflected back. I wanted it too. I wanted him more than I'd ever wanted anything, and when he'd looked into my eyes and said I had him, I crumbled.

I'd pushed up onto my toes, my lips meeting his in a deep, needful kiss. It wasn't enough and in my desperate need for reassurance, I'd taken the lead. My hands roamed his body, quickly becoming frustrated by the lack of skin that met my fingertips. I pulled at his clothes and tore at his buttons in my haste to rid us of the barriers between our bodies. I'd gasped as I felt his warm hands encircle my breasts and lost myself even more when he'd whispered against my damp skin.

Our clothes were quickly shed, lost and forgotten along the smooth wood floor. I needed him now and pushed him back, straddling his hips as he sank into the plush cushions. My mouth moved over every inch of his body, needing to permanently etch the taste and feel of him against my lips into my brain. I lifted my body above him, and we both groaned as I took him inside. My hips rocked against him as he rose up to meet me, our bodies moving as one. I was lost in our connection, feeling it in every fiber of my being. A wave of emotion began to build as the perfectness of the moment threatened to overtake me. I felt him move suddenly, his arms encircling my waist, his face buried against my chest. Every feeling and fear I'd been trying to hide from rushed to the surface, and I couldn't stop the tears that began to form behind my closed eyes. I whispered his name and wrapped my body around him, needing him closer.

"Oh God, Chloe. I need you." His words were simple, and yet they touched a buried place inside of me.

His hand moved to cradle my face and I moaned as he kissed my lips. I began to feel my body tighten as it searched for something just out of reach. His movements quickened and I begged for him to say what I needed to hear.

“Je suis à toi,” he murmured against my ear over and over. The words were foreign to me but the emotion behind them was not. They broke through the last wall, and in that moment I knew that I couldn’t be without him. He’d changed how I saw the world and myself, and I knew that I would never see anything in the same way again. The tears slipped down my cheeks as the intensity of both the physical and emotional connection engulfed me. The sound of his panicked voice brought me back as he pulled me down with him, cradling me against his warm body.

Pressing my face against his chest, I closed my eyes, loving the way his fingers felt entwined with mine. He whispered soft words against my hair and I found myself snuggling farther into his side. In that one moment, lost in the warm embrace of this complex and beautiful man, the world felt right.

Just on the edge of my mind other thoughts were looming, trying to break through and take this away, but I wouldn’t let them. For tonight, until the sun came up and the suitcases were packed, he was mine.

The air had cooled, and even with the heaters just outside the cabana, I could feel the drop in temperature against my skin. Goose bumps spread across my body, but I didn’t want to end this moment. Soft lips pressed against my hair and lingered. I felt his warm breath tickle my scalp and I sighed, loving the simple, yet intimate act. I don’t know how long we stayed that way before his voice broke the silence.

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“We should probably head back downstairs,” he murmured. Was I imagining it, or did he sound as reluctant to leave as I felt? “It’s starting to get cold, and your hair is still wet.” His hand moved up my arm to my hair, and I couldn’t help but close my eyes as his fingers toyed with the damp strands.

“I know,” I sighed, and yet, neither of us moved. He exhaled deeply and my head rose and fell with the movement of his chest. What was he thinking? Did he wonder what would happen tomorrow? Did he look at the luggage sitting in the corner with the same disdain that I did?

Shifting my head, I ran my nose across the smooth skin I’d been resting on, relishing in the way he smelled. I placed a small kiss against his ribs and looked up at him. He was watching me closely, a strange and intense expression on his face. Our gazes held and the tightening in my chest intensified.

“Come downstairs with me,” he said softy. I nodded, still looking into his eyes as he released a deep breath, the warm moist air fanning my face. Moments passed before he made a move, sitting up slowly and pulling me with him. Untangling our limbs, his eyes roamed the patio floor in search of our clothes.

We redressed quickly and I looked behind us as he pulled me by the hand towards the elevators. I was reluctant to leave this perfect place and all that I had experienced here. We passed through the elaborate iron gate and entered the hotel, and I swear I felt the weight of the real world suddenly press in on me ever so slightly. His fingers still entwined with mine, he pulled me against him as the elevator doors closed behind us.

I kissed his neck softly, and encouraged by the soft moan that emanated from his throat, I pushed up onto my toes and brushed my lips against his. His free hand went to my hair, tilting my head as he deepened our kiss. I was barely conscious of the elevator reaching our floor as he pulled me with him, his lips never leaving mine. In an uncharacteristic move, he continued to kiss me as he walked backward down the hall. We bumped into the wall and he smiled against my lips as he took my key card from my hand and fumbled to get it into the lock. We stumbled into the room, breaking our kiss only long enough for him to place the *Do Not Disturb* sign outside the door.

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Opening my eyes, I was instantly filled with a sense that something wasn't right. I ran my hand along the sheets in an attempt to assure myself he was there, only to find an empty spot next to me. The room was dark and I reached for my phone on the bedside table to see the time, 2:43 a.m. I sat up and rubbed my eyes, trying to focus on the room around me and was relieved when I spotted a thin sliver of light seeping out from beneath the bathroom door. *Calm down, Chloe. He's just in the bathroom.*

Lying back against the pillows, I pulled the sheet up to my chin and attempted to shake the uneasy feeling I'd awaken with. I'd been overcome with an unexplainable fear that he'd left sometime during the night. Despite everything that had happened at the pool, I couldn't shake this fear that he would start to pull away again, and I had no idea how I would handle it if he did.

Glancing at the time again, I groaned. In four hours and eight minutes we would be on a plane on our way home. *Home*. A word that used to fill me with such feelings of comfort and security now made my stomach clench with panic and anxiety. Returning home meant going back to a life that very well could end the connection we had shared all week. My stomach dropped just as it did whenever that thought crossed my mind. I could try and push it aside for all it was worth, but that didn't change the fact that by this time tomorrow I'd be in my own bed back in Chicago. Alone.

I rolled over and pulled the pillow against my body, seeking comfort. *His*
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pillow. My eyes closed of their own volition and I wondered briefly if I could get away with taking it with me. I almost laughed at the ridiculousness of that idea and looked towards the bathroom door, trying to focus on any noise I could hear coming from inside. There wasn't any.

I continued to lie there, clutching his pillow as my eyes began to grow heavier. I wanted to wait for him. I knew I was being silly, but I needed the reassurance of his warm body next to mine and the feel of his strong arms wrapped around me. I sighed and smiled slightly as I imagined him holding me, whispering that this was all real and nothing would change in the morning. Before long, my eyes drifted closed and I slipped back into an uneasy sleep.

Some time later, I awoke again, finding that I was still alone. Rolling over quickly I looked at the time, 3:14 a.m. *What?* Fumbling in the darkness, I put on the first thing I found and walked to the bathroom.

"Bennett?" No answer. I knocked softly. "Bennett?" A groan and a soft shuffle sounded from the other side of the door.

"Just go away." His voice was hoarse and echoed off the bathroom walls.

"Bennett, are you okay?"

"I'm just not feeling well. I'll be fine, just go back to bed."

"Is there anything I can get you?" I questioned.

"I'm fine. Just please, go back to bed."

"But-"

"Chloe," he groaned, obviously getting annoyed with my questions.

Okay. I turned, unsure of what to do, battling an odd unsettling feeling. Did he even *get* sick? In a year, I'd never seen him with so much as a stuffy nose. It was obvious he didn't want me hovering outside the door, but there was no way I could go back to sleep either. Walking back to the bed, I straightened the blankets and headed towards the suite's living room. I grabbed a bottle of water from the mini bar and sat on the couch.

If he was sick, I mean *really* sick, there was no way we would make our flight in a couple of hours. I knew it was wrong and I felt horrid for even thinking it, but I couldn't help the momentary feeling of happiness that washed over me. We didn't have to leave. Not yet anyway.

Feeling calmer, although slightly guilty, I switched on the TV and began flipping through the channels. Infomercial. Bad movie. Nick at Nite. Ahh, Wayne's World. Sitting back into the couch, I tucked my legs under me and

prepared to wait. Halfway through the movie, I heard the water running in the bathroom. I sat up and listened as it was the first sound I'd heard in over an hour. The bathroom door opened and I flew off the couch, grabbing another bottle of water before entering the bedroom.

"Are you feeling better?" I asked worriedly.

"Yes, much better. I think I just need to sleep now," he replied as he climbed back into bed, burying his face into the pillow.

"What…what was wrong?" I placed the bottle of water down on the bedside table and sat on the edge of the bed next to him.

"It was just my stomach. I think it was the sushi." His eyes were closed and even in the dim light coming from the other room, I could see that he looked like hell. He turned away from me slightly but I ignored it, placing one hand in his hair and the other on his cheek. His hair was damp and his face was pale and clammy, and despite his initial reaction, he leaned into my touch.

"Why didn't you wake me up?" I asked softly, brushing a few damp strands away from his forehead.

"Because the last thing I wanted was you in there watching me throw up," he replied almost grumpily, and I rolled my eyes, offering him the bottle of water.

"I could have done something. You don't have to be such a man," I teased, relieved when he rolled his eyes back at me.

"I didn't want to wake you." He glanced at me for a moment before looking down. "We have a flight in a couple of hours and you needed to sleep."

"No," I insisted, shaking my head and pulling the covers over him more. "We're not going anywhere.

You just get some rest and I'll take care of everything else." I was surprised when he didn't argue and reluctantly nodded his head in agreement.

"Good, thank you for not being stubborn." He mumbled something under his breath and rolled over, falling asleep almost instantly.

Grabbing my Blackberry and his room key from the dresser, I was about to walk out into the hallway when I noticed what I was wearing: his dress shirt from last night. *Only* his dress shirt. I couldn't go to his room and get his briefcase dressed like this. I rummaged around in my luggage until I found a pair of sleep shorts and put them on. Hopefully no one would be in the halls at this hour. I looked up and down the large hallway before leaving the room and made a bee line for his door. God, why did I feel like I was committing a crime?

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Quickly unlocking his suite, I gathered his briefcase, toiletries, and a fresh change of clothes. I headed back towards my room and mentally made a list of all the things I'd need to do. This is what I was good at, being in charge and making plans. Hopefully this would be the distraction I needed today to keep my mind busy.

As I entered my room, I placed his briefcase on the table and took his clothes with me into the bedroom. The sound of his deep breathing greeted me and I couldn't resist the urge to run my fingers through his hair and place a kiss on his forehead. He stirred slightly and I quickly stepped back, not wanting to wake him. Leaving his clothes in the bathroom, I took what I needed and got to work.

Rearranging our flight turned out to be more difficult than I had originally thought. Between a meeting that couldn't be changed on such short notice and a ton of booked flights, our only option was to fly out late tonight. I rebooked the flight and prayed he was right about it just being something he ate. By 8:30, I'd rescheduled anything I could, spoke to the hotel about our rooms and even placed a call to Esme to find out some of Bennett's favorite things when he was sick. Just as I suspected, the last time she could recall being able to spoil him with chicken noodle soup and popsicles, he'd been wearing a retainer. She'd been delighted to hear from me, and I had to swallow the guilt I felt when she asked if he was behaving. I assured her that all was fine and that he was only suffering from a mild stomach bug. I told her we'd be home tomorrow morning and that of course I'd have him call.

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I heard him moving around a couple more times as he passed between the different rooms, but over the next few hours, his trips became less frequent. I chelled on him often, making sure he wasn't too warm or too cold and that he was drinking, but otherwise gave him the space he needed. He seemed especially grateful for that. I wanted to offer comfort and spend every last minute I could next to him, but I also understood his need to not appear weak in front of me.

With a list items I'd gotten from Esme, I walked into the darkened bedroom to change and chell on him one last time before leaving. I was surprised to find him sitting on the edge of the bed with his eyes trained on the floor. He appeared to be deep in thought, but upon my entering he lifted his gaze to meet mine and the corner of his mouth lifted into a slight smile. Crossing the room, I stopped with my feet just in front of his. Slowly, he reached out and hesitantly placed his hand on my waist. We stood in silence as his thumbs traced small circles along my abdomen and his other hand moved to rest on my hip. Ever so slowly he pulled me closer to him, his eyes focused intently on the patterns he rubbed on my shirt.

“I like you in my shirt,” he said quietly. The edges of his smile lifted a little more, something anyone who had studied his feature any less wouldn’t have noticed.

“Thank you,” I whispered. “I like it too.” The quiet of the room wrapped around us, the only noise being the sound of his fingers brushing along the fabric and our soft breathing. He looked up at me finally, and my chest hurt at how tired he appeared. I reached out to him and lightly brushed the hair from his forehead, loving the way the silky strands slipped through my fingertips.

“Thank you, Chloe.” His words were sincere and gentle, and I accepted them without question, letting us just enjoy this small moment together. His hands seemed to tremble slightly as he slid them to my lower back before wrapping his arms completely around me. I stepped between his legs, my arms encircling him as he rested his cheek against my stomach. He sighed deeply and I leaned in, placing a kiss into his hair. I never wanted to leave.

“You’re welcome.” I spoke softly as I laid my cheek against the top of his head, loving the way he tightened his hold on me. “Are you feeling better?”

“Much,” he answered.

“You look so tired,” I whispered as I began running fingers through the hair at the nape of his neck.

His body seemed to relax further into me and I smiled with the knowledge that I was learning how to comfort him.

“I am,” he affirmed with a nod and a sigh.

Reluctantly, I pulled away and put my hands on his face. “I need to run to a store, so I want you to get more sleep.” I could see that he was about to protest and I shook my head. “Please? I’ve already taken care of everything. All you need to do is rest. Is there anything I can get you before I leave?”

“No, I’m just going to sleep… or throw up. I’ll let you know.”

“Well thank you for sharing,” I laughed, still unwilling to move quite yet.

“Will you promise to put my shirt back on when you come home?” His fingers toyed with the damaged bottom of my shirt, touching where each of the missing buttons would have been. My stomach fluttered at his use of the word “home.”

“Well…if that will make you feel better,” I replied teasingly with a small shrug.

“It will.” He smiled widely at me and the flutter intensified. God, that smile always left me weak. On shaky legs, I pulled away from him to go change,

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conscious of the fact that he was watching my every move.

Gathering my clothes, I slipped into the bathroom and dressed quickly in a pair of yoga pants, a tank top and matching jacket. I pulled my hair up and opted for my glasses rather than my contacts. When I returned to the bedroom, I laid his shirt at the foot of the bed and watched him as I slipped on my running shoes. He seemed to have fallen asleep again, and I battled with myself not to walk over and kiss him goodbye. Maybe getting out for a bit would be a good idea. I placed his cell phone near the bed, making sure the ringer was on vibrate, and with one last look, I quietly stepped out of the room.

It didn't take me long to find a store and pick up what I needed. Within twenty minutes I was on my way back to the hotel. The sound of my cell phone ringing in my purse startled me and I reached for it, thinking instantly of Bennett needing me. I glanced at the caller ID and was only half surprised to see the name *Carlisle* instead. I swallowed loudly as I prepared myself to speak to him.

"Chloe!" His exuberant voice sounded through the phone and I was torn between being happy to hear from him and worried that he would see right through me.

"Hi, Carlisle," I replied, attempting to sound cheerful.

"I hear my son is feeling a bit under the weather today." I couldn't help but smile at the underlying love and fatherly tone of his voice.

"Yes, but don't worry, I'm taking care of him. Bennett's sleeping now, and I'm out getting a few of the things that Esme suggested." The words were out of my mouth before I even registered what I'd said.

"Chloe? Did you just call him Bennett?" *Shit*. I sat silent for a moment, berating myself for being a terrible liar.

"Yes, actually, I did."

"I'm so proud of you two, Chloe. I knew your being forced to spend time together would be a good thing. Didn't I tell you? If you would just stop fighting for five minutes, you'd see how alike you two actually are." *God*. Could this get any worse?

"You did say that, Carlisle. And you were right. We've gotten along great this week," I answered, praying my voice didn't betray me.

"Good. Well let's hope it continues. You take care and tell him I'll talk to him soon."

"I will, Carlisle," I said quietly.

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“Goodbye, Chloe.” I hung up the phone just as I pulled up to the valet, feeling worse than I thought possible. One more lie.

Doing my best to place a cheerful expression on my face, I entered the suite, pleased to hear the TV on in the bedroom.

“Hi,” I said, unable to hide my smile when I saw him sitting up in bed.

“Hey,” he answered back. I couldn’t resist bending over to place a small kiss on his hair before setting down the bag and removing my jacket. He smelled wonderful, and the scent of his soap and shampoo filled the room.

“You look better.” He had obviously showered and was wearing the pajama bottoms I had brought him.

“I feel better.” Lifting his arm, I couldn’t help but laugh as he held up his shirt. “Remember?”

“How could I forget? Here, eat something while I change,” I said as I emptied the bag in front of him. I looked up to find him staring at me. “What? Did I forget something?”

“How did you know to get all this?” He asked, eyeing the items in front of him with a confused expression.

“I talked to your mom this morning. Frankly, she was surprised to hear that Superman was sick. By the way, she said to mention that you haven’t called her in two weeks.” I began to feel uncomfortable as he continued to look at me. “Was that not okay?”

“I can’t believe you called my mom,” he replied quietly. “Thank you.”

“It was nothing.” I shrugged and took the shirt from him, a bit uneasy under his gaze. I stepped into the bathroom and changed, putting his shirt back on and psyching myself up to attempt to have an actual conversation with him. Returning to the room, I saw he had opened the juice and was eating a popsicle. I was unsure of where to go when he patted the bed next to him. I climbed in, sitting with my head against the headboard, and took the popsicle he offered me.

“So, I made most of the arrangements earlier. We have a flight tonight at eleven if you’re up to it and I rescheduled everything but you’re meeting to sign the papers tomorrow evening at JemCo.” He nodded slowly and seemed to be thinking. “What are we watching?”

“Clerks, it’s a commercial right now,” he answered, still not looking at me.

“Awesome. That’s one of my favorite movies,” I said as I settled back into the pillows.

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“I know. You were quoting it the first day I met you.”

“Actually, that was Clerks 2,” I clarified, and then stopped. “Wait, you remember that?” I turned towards him, surprised that he had any recollection of our horrible first meeting.

“Of course I remember that.” His head was down and the regret in his voice was clear.

“But-” I stopped, unable to even form the words that I wanted to say.

“I know,” he said as he looked at me, pain and remorse evident in his features. “I was a bastard to you, Chloe.” Reaching over, he took my hand, entwining his fingers with my own. He looked look down at our joined hands, his thumb moving in small circles across my skin. “I’ve…when I think of how I used to…” he trailed off, seemingly unable to finish his thought. I continued to watch him, moved beyond words by his admission. This was…so unexpected.

“We both did, Bennett. It’s fine. It was as much my fault as it was yours.” He looked at me then, and the intensity of his eyes sent a tremor through me. “Really.” He nodded and turned back to the TV. I knew there was so much more that we both needed to say, but I couldn’t help but be slightly proud at what, in my opinion, was a huge admission. We fell into a comfortable silence as we continued to watch the movie. We both laughed in the same places and slowly shifted our bodies until our arms were pressed against each other. At some point, my head fell to his shoulder and I closed my eyes, and after a few minutes he laid his against mine. Out of the corner of my eye I glanced at the clock on the wall and inwardly sighed as I mentally calculated the hours I had left with him.

My stomach growled, and I realized I had yet to eat today. “Are you ready to eat something more than popsicles?” I asked as I reluctantly moved away from him, retrieving the room service menu from the dresser.

“I could probably eat something light,” he answered. “It’s been hours so I should be good.” We looked over the choices and I placed the order, a chicken salad for me and chicken soup for him. We began another movie as we waited, coming to an easy decision to order Shaun of the Dead from the on screen menu. I was surprised to notice when a knock sounded at the door signaling lunch had arrived, that we had once again gravitated back towards each other, my bare feet now twisted with his under the blanket.

We ate in companionable silence and continued to watch the movie. About half way through I was surprised to hear Bennett’s voice. “Chloe? What’s your favorite movie?” I turned to him, surprised by the question.

“Well,” I began. “I tend to like funny movies. Clerks, Tommy Boy, Shaun of the Dead, Hot Fuzz, Clue; things like that. But I would have to say my all time favorite movie would probably be Rear Window.”

“Because of Jimmy Stewart or Grace Kelly?” I smiled, surprised that he knew it.

“Both, but probably Grace Kelly.”

“I can see that. You have very Grace Kelly-like tendencies about you.” His hand came up and smoothed a piece of my hair that had come lose from my ponytail. I’ve never been the type of girl who blushed, but I looked down and I felt my cheeks heat. “Except for your filthy mouth that is,” he added. I looked up at him with feigned shock on my face.

“Very funny, jackass.” I said as I smacked his arm. He chuckled, obviously very pleased with himself.

“You know, if you would shut up once in a while you’d be damn near perfect. I’ve even considered walking around with a roll of tape in my purse.” I popped a cracker into my mouth and he looked at me for a moment before breaking into the sexiest laugh I’d ever heard. Yeah, that was rapidly becoming my favorite sound.

“Oh, I don’t know. I think you like some of the things that come out of my mouth. Right, ma petite chèrie?” He leaned in towards me and ran his nose along my neck. *God, he’s such a smooth bastard*.

“You don’t play fair,” I sighed, feeling him laugh softly against my skin.

“You say that like it’s a bad thing.” He had turned completely towards me now, his legs tangled in mine and his hand resting on my bare thigh. My breath hitched slightly as his lips ghosted along my ear. “Okay, okay,” he said with a chuckle, pulling away slightly and resting his head on the pillow.

“Favorite color?”

“Not so fast, you didn’t tell me your favorite movie.” We were now both lying on our sides facing each other, and I noticed happily that his color had returned.

“Oh, are we taking turns now?” he laughed, his smile widening.

“Unless you can think of something else to do.” He raised his eyebrows at me and I did my best to ignore him.

“Well, to be honest, I liked all the movies you named.” I looked at him in shock.

“Really?”

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“Why does that surprise you?” He moved the arm he was laying on to the pillow above his head and his fingers began to absentmindedly play with the strands of my hair.

“I don’t know, I guess I just assumed it would be some artsy movie.” He laughed again and I smiled widely at the sound.

“Well I do enjoy a lot of *artsy* movies,” he began. “But I like plain old funny movies too. Okay, my turn, favorite color?”

“Probably pink.”

“Well that’s a perfectly acceptable girl answer,” he teased, our movie all but forgotten.

I looked at him, raising an eyebrow at his comment. “Favorite color?” His gaze moved behind me as he considered.

“Hmmm….I’m going to go with, whichever of your panties are in my pocket at the end of the night.

That color.”

” Oh God,” I moaned, not even attempting to hide how ridiculous an answer that was.

“What? That *is* my favorite color.” He could see I was still waiting. “Okay, blue,” he finally relented.

“Well that’s a perfectly acceptable *boy* answer,” I teased back. He laughed again and I was surprised at how easy this was, the two of us just talking. “Bennett?” I said, trying to sound nonchalant. “Where are they?” I couldn’t hide the interest in my voice as I asked.

“Somewhere safe.”

“Can I see?”

“No.”

“Why?” I asked, narrowing my eyes at him.

“Because you’ll try and take them back.”

“Why would I want them back? They’re all ripped.” He grinned at me but didn’t answer.

“Why do you do that anyway?” He studied me for a moment, obviously considering his answer.

Finally, he lifted himself onto his elbow and moved his face to mine. The

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backs of his fingers brushed my jaw ever so gently before he brought his lips to mine in the softest of kisses.

Pulling back, he looked into my eyes, “For the same reason you like it.” My pulse instantly sped up and I cleared my throat.

“Will you tell me something?” He nodded and I continued. “Tell me about your tattoo?” My finger slid down his bare chest to the edge of his tattoo peaking out above his pajamas. I smiled as he shivered slightly.

“It’s really not a very interesting story. I was twenty-one and had just moved to Paris. In fact it was the first week I arrived. I loved everything about being there. I had been offered an amazing opportunity, I lived in a beautiful city, and it was everything I’d ever hoped for. But I soon found myself questioning my decision. I missed my family and I wondered if I’d made the right choice to separate myself from them by moving half way around the world just to prove I could make it on my own. So I was walking down the street one day, feeling confused and actually considering going home and I turned into this little cafe called Le Cafe du Coeur . I sat down and this song was playing in the background by Edith Piaf, called “Je Ne Regrette Rien” . I had such a visceral reaction as I listened to the lyrics; I can’t describe it…it just connected with me. I knew right then that it meant something, that this was how I needed to live my life; to make every decision count and to look back and know it all happened for a reason. ‘ *Je Ne Regrette Rien,’* it means, I regret nothing.”

” I think that’s a beautiful story” I said, completely enraptured in the image of a young Bennett, lonely and questioning his decision to leave his family and go off on his own. He nodded. “And is that true?

That’s how you’ve lived your life?”

“It is. I regret nothing that’s happened in my life, none of the decisions I’ve made.” He placed his hand on my face. “I don’t regret anything that’s happened between us. I want you to know that.” His fingers slid gently across my shoulder and down my arm. He took my hand in his, placing his palm flat against mine. I followed his eyes to our hands and watched as he slowly entwined our fingers. ” *Je ne regrette rien.* I don’t regret this, Chloe.” He brought our joined hands to his mouth and placed a soft kiss on the back of my hand. How in the world could he make something as chaste as a kiss on the hand seem so intimate? I couldn’t help the soft moan that escaped me and he laughed quietly, placing another soft, lingering kiss there. “I love that it has that effect on you.” I’d been rendered slightly incoherent by this point and simply nodded. “Chloe, have you ever been to Paris?”

“No,” I answered, shaking my head.

“Do you think you’d ever want to?”

“Sure. If the opportunity ever came up, I’d love to.” He nodded, but said nothing else about the subject. We continued to talk for hours, eventually taking a break to order dinner and even watching another movie. At some point, I fell asleep and woke to the sound of the alarm going off on my phone.

Reaching over, I grabbed it and shut it off, noticing how dark the room had become. I looked at him asleep next to me and realized with a sinking feeling in my chest that our time was up. I couldn’t believe that for those few hours we spent talking, I hadn’t thought about going home once. Now however, I could feel the panic beginning to take hold. Slipping from the bed I stepped into the bathroom and splashed cold water on my face. There was no hiding from reality anymore, it was inevitable. Turning on a few lights, I slowly made my way back to the bed to wake him. He stirred and his eyes opened. He looked confused at first as he watched me, but I knew the moment of realization dawned on him.

“Is it time?” he asked, a nod being my only reply. He sat up and swung his legs off the bed, running his hands through his hair.

“I’m going to get in the shower and get ready.” My voice was hollow and lifeless, sounding strange to my own ears. The mood in the air was heavy and suffocating.

“I’ll go to my room and do the same.” I turned and went into the bathroom, shutting the door behind me. Closing my eyes, I leaned my forehead against the cool wood, listening as he moved around to get dressed and eventually passing the bathroom on his way to leave. I felt his footfalls across the carpet and sensed him stop just outside. Something brushed against the other side, and I couldn’t help but imagine him placing his hand on the door separating us. I heard him sigh and step away, the sound soon followed by the click of the lock as he closed the door behind him.

The silence around me was deafening and I realized I was now alone. I was unable to stop the sob that tore through my throat as I sank to my knees onto the bathroom floor. Ceaseless sobs racked my body and hot tears flowed freely down my cheeks as I realized that the man I loved had just left. I’d tried to keep him out. I’d tried to remind myself that he was a player and no good for me, that he was unavailable and could never be mine, but none of it mattered. At some point, I had given him my heart and I knew now that I would never get it back.

I’m not sure how long I sat there, but eventually the tears stopped, and I

emerged from the haze long enough to realize that I was still sitting on the cold marble floor with my arms wrapped tightly around me. I was grateful for the sense of numbness that overtook me as I pulled myself up and turned on the shower. I moved through the motions of getting ready, barely conscious of my surroundings. I dressed and moved as if in a trance as I gathered all my things and placed them in my bags. When the last thing was packed I sat on the edge of the bed and looked at the luggage sitting in the corner. It mocked me, representing all that I was leaving behind. Its presence seemed to grow in the stillness of the room, taunting me.

Still blessedly shrouded in an aching numbness, unbidden images passed through my mind.

Among them, I saw his smile at the airport. I heard his voice as he told me he wanted me. I saw how beautiful he was as he covered my body with his. I watched him laugh as he playfully teased. One last memory stood out above the rest, something so trivial that to anyone else it would seem meaningless. Closing my eyes, I let the image of a darkened room fill the emptiness behind my closed lids. I let the sound of him saying my name wash over me, remembering how it felt to hear him whisper it against my skin as he held me in this very bed.

A knock sounded against the door and I stood, smoothing my skirt before I made my way to it. Taking a deep breath, I swung it open to reveal him standing in the hallway. He looked perfect as usual in a gorgeous dark suit and tie. His hair stood in its usual disarray, and the slight scruff that still lined his jaw showed that he had decided to forgo shaving. His eyes met mine and narrowed briefly as he took in my appearance, and if he noticed anything was wrong, he was thoughtful enough not to bring it up.

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I moved aside so he could enter, and his body brushed up against mine as he passed. Without thinking, I pushed him roughly against the wall and twisted his tie around my hand, pulling him down to me. My lips met his harshly and he froze, surprised at my sudden action. My free hand moved up his chest and fisted in the hair at the nape of his neck.

His body slowly began to relax against me, and as his tongue reached out to meet mine, I groaned into his mouth. In the back of my mind, I knew that I was being manipulative. This was a last desperate attempt to keep him here with me. Even then, with the shame of what I was doing burning in my gut, I was helpless to stop it. I rocked my hips against him and felt a thrill rush through me as his hardened cock pressed against my stomach. My hands moved between us to his belt, pulling him closer to where I needed him to be.

“Baby,” he moaned breathlessly, pulling his mouth away from mine. “Baby, we don’t have time for this.”

“I don’t fucking care. I want you.” He swore under his breath and tangled his hands deeper into my hair, his mouth returning roughly to mine. “Oh God, Bennett. I need you.” I wrapped one of my legs around him, the heel of my shoe digging into his calf. A hand slid down my neck and cupped my breast roughly, causing me to gasp as I rocked against him. We stumbled forward in the small entryway and I felt my back pushed against the cool wall. Placing my hand over his, I locked our fingers together and slid it down my body to my thigh. “Tell me that you want me.” I pushed our fingers further up my thigh and under my skirt.

Pulling his lips from mine, he looked down at our joined hands resting on my thigh. Unthreading our fingers he wrapped his hand more firmly around my leg and lifted, hitching it higher on his hip. “You have no idea how badly I want you, baby.” He pushed against me as his fingers toyed with the straps of my garter belt. Using the hand still wrapped in my hair, he moved my head to the side, leaving my neck open to his hungry kisses.

“Fuck me, Bennett. Please.” I felt him groan loudly against my neck, and I gasped as I felt his teeth sshite the tender skin there. His fingers still splayed on my thigh moved further up to my panties. I couldn’t hide the groan as I felt him wrap the delicate strap around his fist. “Just one more time.

Please.”

His body stilled, and I was suddenly aware of the wild thrumming of my heart against his chest. He pulled his head from my neck, his eyes searching my face.

“What?” I whispered breathlessly. “Don’t stop.” I leaned forward and placed my lips against his, only to have him pull farther back.

“Chloe, stop,” he said softly. I felt his grip loosen on my panties before sliding his hand down my leg and eventually releasing it all together. “Baby, what are you doing?”

I looked down, no longer wanting to look in his beautiful eyes.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Even to me, the words sounded like a lie.

I felt him place a hand on either side of my face, and he brought my eyes up to meet his. “Listen to me, Chloe. I want more from you than this. And when we get on that plane, everything that we have here will come with us. I promise you.” My eyes searched his face and saw nothing but sincerity there. “Do you believe me? Je suis à toi. I. Am. Yours.” I *wanted* to believe him, more than

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anything.

“Yes.” He brought his forehead to rest against mine and I closed my eyes.

“I promise, Chloe.”

“And I’m yours.” He smiled the most beautiful smile I’d ever seen and placed his warm lips softly to mine. My heart screamed to tell him I loved him, but my head wouldn’t let me. Was this all I could have with him? As I thought about it, I realized that if this was all that he could give me, I would gladly take it.

He pulled away and straightened my dress before attending to himself. “Are you ready?” I nodded and I felt his fingertips brush against my palm before his hand wrapped around mine. “The bellman is coming up to get our bags,” he said, motioning behind us. I nodded again as he pulled us towards the door. I took a deep breath and readied myself for all that awaited us. He squeezed my hand in reassurance as he opened the door. Voices carried back into us from the hall and before we stepped out, he brought our joined hands to his mouth and kissed it softly. “Je suis à toi,” he said once more, and I understood.

I followed him out into the hall and felt his hand fall from mine.

EBOOK ECXLUSIVE

FOURTEEN - Avec Toi, Je Suis Enfin à la Maison

The sound of the jet engines whirled around us, the constant vibration coupled with the soothing darkness of the first class cabin attempting to ease my exhausted body into sleep. It wasn't working.

Even if my body wanted to, there was no way my mind could. One after another, images flickered through my head like scenes in a movie. Every moment of being with her, no matter how inconsequential it seemed at the time, was now burned into my brain and played before my closed eyes.

I watched it go by in a blurry rush. I saw her for the first time as she smiled and laughed, reliving the enormity of knowing that somehow my life would never be the same. I recalled the first time I let myself touch her, my hand creeping up her thigh in a darkened conference room, learning the unfathomable completeness of being inside her body. I laughed at all the times I lied to myself, thinking that if I had her once I could walk away but knowing from the moment we came together, it would never be enough. My chest tightened and I was overcome with the same flood of emotion I felt that night at the pool when I recalled the exact moment I knew I couldn't live without her.

I looked down to where my hand was currently wrapped around hers, hidden under the blue blanket across our laps. I'd been forced to let her go as we stepped into the hallway at the hotel, and from the moment we entered the car I hadn't released it again until we reached the airport. As we settled into our seats, it had been obvious that she was exhausted, and within minutes of taking off I saw her eyes begin to droop. Knowing I couldn't resist touching her the entire flight, I'd asked for the blanket and immediately put it over our laps, once again taking her hand in mine.

It was early morning, and the sky was still dark, the dimness broken up by only a few overhead reading lamps casting small pools of light throughout the cabin. It felt oddly peaceful. I turned my head slightly to look down at her and felt myself smile. Her eyes were closed, her mouth open slightly as her chest rose and fell with her slumbering breaths. Her head had fallen over onto my shoulder, and although I knew I should, I couldn't bring myself to move her. A soft wave of dark hair fell across her forehead, and I was unable to stop my free hand from reaching over and sweeping it away. She was beautiful.

I knew she had been up all night with me, and while I slept during the day she

had been busy making travel arrangements and taking care of my schedule. I still couldn't wrap my head around the way she had been there for me; calling my mom to find out my favorite things, making sure every last detail was in order, and most of all just taking care of me. Although it was miserable being sick, I would do it over and over again just to spend another day with her like today.

We had talked and laughed; and if there was one sound I would never grow tired of, it was the sound of her laughter. I knew how to bring her body pleasure but to know that I could make her happy in other ways was something I was still getting used to. We'd talked about books and movies, favorite colors and childhood friends, both of us surprised by how much we actually had in common. I'd had to admit to being slightly shocked when she'd asked for the whereabouts of her panties. I couldn't stop the smile that spread across my face as I pictured the desk drawer in my office, now full of expensive lace and satin.

We seemed to fit together so easily, and I was pleasantly surprised to see that being together like that was every bit as natural and comfortable as being together sexually. I felt myself falling a little deeper with every moment I spent with her, and I was starting to realize that I didn't *want* to find a way out.

We had fallen asleep at some point, our arms and legs tangled together, and I'd awaken to find a completely withdrawn Chloe walking towards me. I knew without her saying a word that it was time.

She'd excused herself to shower, and I'd done the same, stopping and placing my hand against the bathroom door on my way out. I needed to say something, but was at a loss as to what.

I returned to my room and felt the difference immediately. My suite was quiet and cold, having none of the comfort and warmth that permeated every inch of Chloe's. The solitary atmosphere I would have once craved now felt hollow, the loneliness literally palpable in the air. I dressed and packed quickly, knowing only that I wanted to return to her. My emotions were a jumbled mess, and although I had no idea how to move forward, I knew that together we could find a way.

As I'd walked the short distance to her room, I worried slightly about what I would find when I got there. The look on her face when I'd woken up was in such sharp contrast to the carefree mood from earlier. I felt her pull away more every second and hoped she would give us a chance to work through this.

My heart dropped at the sight that greeted me as she opened the door. She was beautiful as always, but her features seemed pained and she appeared to have been crying. Her gaze quickly left mine, and it was obvious that she was

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embarrassed and uncomfortable with my seeing her like this.

Gritting my teeth to keep from saying something, I brushed by her to enter the room, surprised when she suddenly pushed me against the wall.

I stood frozen, shocked by her actions until my body began to respond on its own. Her kisses were frantic and desperate, and I felt myself being drawn into her again. Words of desire passed between us and although we didn't have time, I let myself be caught up in her urgency. Our moans bounced off the marble entryway, and I was mindful only of the want that pulled us forward. She led our interlocked hands down her body and under her skirt. I moaned as my fingers brushed the straps of her garter belt and moved further up, wrapping the delicate strap of her panties around my fist.

"Fuck me, Bennett. Please."

Her words shot straight through me, and I kissed and bit roughly up and down her neck.

"Just one more time. Please."

Her words were so needful and anxious that I pulled away, looking deeply into her eyes. This wasn't the Chloe I knew. She looked frightened and ashamed, and I was certain that I never wanted to see that look on her face again.

"What? Don't stop." She leaned in to kiss me again and I pulled away.

"Chloe, stop," I said, sliding my hands up her body. "Baby, what are you doing?" My stomach clenched as she looked down, unable to meet my gaze. Did she think this was all I wanted from her?

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Listen to me, Chloe," I began, taking her face between my hands and lifting her chin to bring her gaze to mine. "I want more from you than this. And when we get on that plane, everything that we have here will come with us. I promise you. Do you believe me? Je suis à toi. I. Am. Yours." *Please believe me, Chloe.*

She looked at me so intently, and I could see that she wanted to believe me. She whispered the only thing I needed to hear, "Yes," and I pressed my forehead to hers, silently promising the both of us that I would find a way to make this work. "And I'm yours."

I looked at her and couldn't hold back my smile. I hadn't realized how much I needed to hear the words from her, and I released a deep breath, letting the feeling wash over me. She was mine.

I helped her right her clothes and took her hand, entwining my fingers with

hers. “Are you ready?” I asked quietly, hoping she understood all that my question entailed. She nodded once and met my eyes, smiling softly as I gave her hand a reassuring squeeze. We both knew what leaving this place meant. The minute we stepped out the door, we would have to once again become Mr. Ryan and Ms. Mills.

“The bellman is coming to get our bags,” I said, motioning behind us. Opening the door slightly, I noticed the look of anxiety return to her face. Lifting her hand to my lips, I kissed it gently. “Je suis à toi,” I whispered against her skin, trying to convey the depth of my feelings in those simple words. As I crossed the threshold into the hallway, I reluctantly let go of her hand, feeling the loss instantly. I nodded politely as a group of travelers passed me and closed the door behind us, already counting down the minutes until I could touch her again.

The pilot’s voice over the speaker broke through my memories, and I opened my eyes again to peer at Chloe. She was still sleeping soundly and after glancing quickly at the other passengers, I leaned into her. The smell of oranges drifted up to me as I pressed a soft kiss against her hair.

“Chloe,” I whispered, shifting slightly to place another kiss on her forehead. “Chloe, baby. We’re almost there.” I ran my fingers lightly through her hair as she began to stir. Opening her eyes, she smiled and then moved to sit up, looking slightly shocked to see me so close.

“It’s okay,” I began, placing my hand on her face. “Everyone’s still asleep. No one’s even looked at us the whole flight.” She nodded and then leaned back into me slightly, her free hand covering our joined ones.

“Are we home?” I looked at her intently for a moment, trying to decipher why her question seemed to pull at something inside of me. To be honest, it hadn’t ever really occurred to me that we weren’t home. Chloe was with me, and apparently, that’s all I needed. “Bennett?” I shook my head slightly and smiled at her.

“Yeah, we’ll be landing any minute.” She nodded as she turned towards the window and I began to think about what would happen when we reached the airport. One thought in particular had been brewing in my mind since last night: I wanted her to come home with me. Was that crossing the line?

God, I had no idea, I was so out of my element here. I only knew that things couldn’t go back to the way they were. There was no way I could see her only during the week and keep my touches limited to chance encounters in secluded places. I wanted to make love to her in my bed. I wanted to see where she lived, to take her to dinner and not be afraid of being seen. Clearing my throat, I

decided it was now or never.

“Chloe, I-”

My question was cut off by an announcement from the crew informing us of our impending descent.

The other passengers began to stir around us and I knew the moment was lost.

The next ten minutes were spent with us organizing our things and me trying to psyche myself up again to ask her. Our landing was smooth and before I knew it, we were making our way towards the baggage claim. We stood next to each other, our shoulders barely touching, and I found myself covertly studying her profile. How I ever thought I could resist this woman was beyond me. She was soft and beautiful and it was amazing to learn that she was even more beautiful on the inside.

A wave of emotion rose inside of me, and I knew I didn’t want to be apart from her. *Fuck, when did I turn into such a woman?* I turned to face her and placed my hand on her arm. “Chloe, I wa-”

“Chloe!” We both turned towards a young blonde around her age rushing towards us. “Chloe, it is you.

Oh my God, I thought I saw you in the airport in Seattle but wasn’t sure.” I dropped my hand and stepped back slightly as the girl reached us.

“Sara, hi! You saw me in Seattle?” She was smiling at her friend, but glanced quickly at me, a slight look of panic on her face.

“I did. I wanted to come over to you but my phone kept ringing. Hey, wanna share a cab home?”

Sara waited expectantly and my stomach dropped.

“Oh..um, sure,” she stammered, glancing over at me. “Sara and I live in neighboring apartment buildings.” I smiled and nodded as Sara began to detail every minute of her visit with her boyfriend to Chloe. She wouldn’t need a ride home. She wouldn’t be coming over. I wouldn’t even really get to say goodbye. I swallowed loudly, my chest tightening at that thought. Chloe had obviously realized it too because she kept sneaking glances at me over her friend’s shoulder.

Our bags appeared on the conveyor belt, and I retrieved them, offering to help them both to a cab. As I placed the luggage in the trunk, I caught Chloe’s eye across the top of the car. I smiled softly and hoped she understood all that I wanted to say. She walked back to stow her carry-on and my hand brushed up

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against hers inside the trunk. “I’ll call you,” I said quietly. Our eyes met and she nodded, her fingers wrapping around mine momentarily before stepping back. Sara made her way to us and placed her bag in beside Chloe’s.

“Ready to go?” she asked, oblivious to the silent exchange.

“Sure,” Chloe hesitated slightly before looking at me. “I’ll see you Monday, Mr. Ryan.” Turning quickly, she climbed into the cab and closed the door. Stepping onto the curb, I watched until they were out of sight, already feeling the ache of her absence. A horn blaring off in the distance brought my attention back and I retrieved my luggage and began making my way to the long term lot.

Once I was inside my car, I started the engine and pulled out my phone, texting the first thing that came to mind.

I can still smell your hair.

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Later that night, I sat across a board room table from my father and brother. My father had been thrilled to see me home from Seattle and even more thrilled that Chloe and I were getting along.

“Bennett, I can’t tell you how proud I am that you two have finally settled your differences. I’m telling you, work is going to be a much more pleasant experience for the both of you.”

“I couldn’t agree more, Dad,” I replied, my eyes on the folder before me. I hated lying to my family but even more, I couldn’t get over the feeling that my brother knew something. Rosalie had given me her word that she wouldn’t say anything, but Emmett had a way of seeing things you’d prefer he didn’t.

PROOF EXCLUSIVE

For being such a dumb jock in college, he’d sure turned into a smart son of a bitch somewhere along the line. I’d ignored four of his calls and two text messages while I was gone, and the look he gave me as I walked into the meeting earlier told me that I wouldn’t be able to put off this conversation much longer.

“So,” he began, tapping his fingers on the table. “Will Chloe be joining us?” I looked up at him with narrowed eyes. *Fuck you, Emmett.*

“No,” I stated flatly. “Ms. Mills ran into a friend at the airport, and I believe they were going out this evening.” I continued to glare at him, knowing he wouldn’t dare to say something in front of our father. Our staring match was disrupted by the client stepping into the room and we got down to business.

An hour later, I sat at the back of the darkened room watching a slide show
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presentation, glad to be out of view of my jackass brother. My phone vibrated and my heart sped up, hoping it would be her.

She hadn't returned my text from earlier, and I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a bit worried. Trying to appear nonchalant, I took my phone out of my pocket and looked at it.

I can still feel your touch.

I laid my phone face down on the table and attempted to not let any shock I felt show in my expression. When I was sure no one was looking, I tilted it back up again and re-read the message.

Fuck. I looked at the time and wondered how much longer we'd be in here. Trying to appear uninterested, I quickly typed a message in response and slipped the phone back into my pocket.

I can still taste your lips.

Three minutes later, I felt my pocket vibrate again.

I miss your tattoo.

My head fell back against the wall as I repeated the words back to myself. She missed my tattoo. *Shit.*

God, I didn't even know how to respond to that.

I miss you seeing it. I worried when I didn't hear from you. Everything ok?

I couldn't believe how nervous I felt. What if she had changed her mind?

Sorry. My volume was off and I fell asleep. Someone kept me up all week.

Fuck. I didn't know which emotion was stronger, relief that she hadn't had second thoughts or lust as I thought back to all the ways we had kept each other from sleeping. I suppressed a groan and had to readjust myself in my pants.

I can't say I'm sorry. I'd do it all over again if you'd let me.

I couldn't keep the smirk from pulling at my lips and looked up to see my brother leaning far back in his chair, watching me. Shit, this was going to be a problem. Seconds later, another message arrived. I gave him a glare that told him to mind his own business. He looked away, and I glanced at the message.

I think I might like that.

I almost dropped the phone. I cringed knowing I already had plans for the night, my father having already asked me to visit my mother. Taking a deep breath, I typed a reply.

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I have to go to my parents tonight. Can I call you when I'm done?

Definitely.

I want to see you tomorrow.

My finger hovered over the send key. I was ready for this, but was she? I needed this, *we* needed this.

Closing my eyes, I sent the message and waited. Seconds later, my phone vibrated in my hand.

I want to see you too.

Oh thank fucking God. My head fell forward and I exhaled deeply. She wanted this. A plan began to form in my head.

My place? I'll make you dinner.

I'd love that. Can I make a request?

A request? I laughed as it occurred to me that I would probably give her anything she asked for. I answered quickly.

Anything.

Wear jeans.

What? She wanted me in jeans? I shook my head and chuckled as I answered her.

Jeans, huh? You got it. Can I make a request?

Anything.

Smiling, I thought of her long legs and the feel of my hands sliding up them.

Wear a dress.

A dress, huh? Hmmm. .You got it. Oh, and don't shave.

I stared at the phone in my hand, remembering the sounds she made as I ran my face up the inside of her thigh and felt myself harden again. This was going to be a long night.

I'm still in my meeting; I'll talk to you in a couple hours, deal?

Deal.

I hesitated for a moment before I typed out my response, rubbing my thumb back and forth across the send button and wondering if I was doing the right thing.

I miss you, Chloe.

FBOOK EXXLUSIVE

I miss you too.

She missed me. Running my finger over the screen, I re-read her words, already anticipating the moment I would see her again.

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I awoke the next morning full of nervous energy. She would be here tonight, in my home and possibly in my bed. I had imagined it hundreds of times, never once thinking it would become a reality.

Knowing that in a mere ten hours she would be standing in my apartment filled me with a sense of excitement I'd never known before. Getting up I quickly dressed in shorts, a t-shirt, and running shoes. I knew a run was the only thing that would clear my head and calm me down enough to get through the day. Going to the gym was out of the question. There was a chance I'd run into Emmett, and until Chloe and I decided a few things, I didn't want to be forced into talking to him.

Grabbing a bottle of water and my iPod, I left my apartment and took the elevator to the running track on the roof of the building. Turning the music up I began to stretch, already feeling the tension leave my body. I ran until my muscles burned and my chest ached, leaving my mind blissfully clear.

Seven miles later I slowed to a walk, coming to a stop at the glass railing that surrounded the running track. It was moments like this that living here was worth every penny. At this height, the view was extraordinary. I found myself looking out into the city, past the tall buildings and towards the direction I knew Chloe's apartment to be. Five minutes. I sometimes found it hard to believe that all this time we had lived only five minutes apart from each other.

I knew that at some point tonight we needed to talk. I wanted to keep seeing her; there was no doubt about that, but what about everyone else? I knew that we really shouldn't see each other while I was still her boss, but the selfish side of me didn't want to let that go either. I shook my head, knowing fully well what a bastard I was for all of this. A part of me knew that no matter what, any relationship the two of us had would always be tarnished in other's eyes. Chloe would always be the secretary who fucked her boss and I would always be the cad who took advantage of her.

Scrubbing my hands roughly over my face, I let out a deep breath. I would just talk to her and let her make the decision. It would all work out. It had to.

Later that night I made one final walk through of my home. Everything was perfect. I'd gone shopping; getting everything together to make the one thing I'd
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seen her order countless times at lunch meetings, Chicken Piccata. I'd gone out and rented all her favorite movies, the ones I didn't have anyway. I'd gotten her flowers and even dressed like she'd asked, in jeans and a black t-shirt. My face was unshaven as well. Everything was ready, and I was in the kitchen cutting vegetables when the doorbell rang. My hand froze, and my heart rate accelerated instantly. She was finally here.

I opened the door, the air leaving my lungs when I saw her standing in the hallway. She turned towards the sound and our eyes met, a slight smile turning up the corner of her lips. Her hair was down around her shoulders, and my fingers instantly itched to tangle into it. She wore a simple black dress that with its high neck and long sleeves would have been considered conservative had it not been for the length. It stopped mid thigh, emphasizing every inch of her long, sexy legs. Between that, her shoes, and the thought of what she could be wearing underneath, all of my plans to take things slow went out the window.

"Hi," I said with a smile. She raised an eyebrow, obviously seeing my appreciation and smiled widely back.

"Hi," she answered.

"Chloe, you look beautiful," I whispered, unable to wait one more second to touch her. I stepped into the hallway and reached out to her, my fingers wrapping around the back of her neck. Neither of us moved, our eyes burning into the others and the light scent of her perfume drawing me in. My fingers gripped her more firmly and I pulled her to me a fraction of an inch, her breath catching with the movement. My eyes fell to her mouth, and I groaned inwardly as I watched her take her lower lip between her teeth, becoming mesmerized by the action. With agonizing slowness, I pulled her to me, closing my eyes as we finally kissed.

Touching her lips softly, I moaned at the sweet familiarity of her kiss. Slowly I pulled away and looked once more into her eyes before leaning in again, taking her bottom lip between mine. She sighed against me and her breath fanned across my face, bringing with it the scent and taste of chocolate. I smiled against her lips as I remembered her familiar habit of eating a Hershey's kiss from her purse when she was nervous.

Her lips parted and she moaned quietly as my tongue entered her mouth, slipping languidly against hers. My hands gripped her neck and hair, and I tilted her head, angling her into my kiss. What started out as a soft, unhurried moment was rapidly building in intensity. My lips became greedy, tasting and teasing her, the feel of her lips against mine consuming me.

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A door closed down the hall and I realized we were still standing outside my apartment. Reluctantly I pulled away, my nose still touching hers.

“We need to go inside or I’ll take you right here in his hallway.” Her lips brushed against mine and she smiled.

“I don’t think I’d mind that.”

I groaned and forced myself to place some distance between us, my fingers sliding softly down her arm and capturing her hand in mine.

“Come on, you tease, let me feed you.” I winked, and her smile widened as I pulled her into my apartment. Closing the door behind us, I watched expectantly as her eyes roamed the space. She was quiet for a long moment, and I wished I knew what she was thinking.

“This is beautiful, Bennett.” I watched her walk further into my home and was surprised by how right it felt. Her gaze fell on the large floor to ceiling windows and she walked towards them, her fingers trailing along the backs of my dining room chairs as she passed. She stopped in front of the large pane of glass and sighed. “Wow. This is just amazing.” The sun was setting and the city lights wrapped around the room, twinkling through the glass that spanned both exterior walls. I walked slowly towards her and a flash of guilt struck me as I was reminded of our first time together.

I stood next to her and unable to resist, I cupped her chin in my hand and turned her face towards me, bending over to place another soft kiss against her mouth. Pulling away, I felt the loss instantly as our gazes met. “Have I already told you that you look beautiful?” She smiled and kissed my palm before answering.

“You did, and thank you. You look,” she paused and her eyes roamed appreciatively up and down my body. “Pretty damn good yourself.” I laughed loudly and took her hand in mine, loving the way she could so easily turn the tables on me.

“Thank you,” I replied, pulling her with me. “Let’s give you the tour.”

I showed her around, enjoying her reaction to each room. As we stood in my bedroom doorway I motioned inside. “This is my room,” I said quietly, already imagining her in my bed. Our eyes met, and the mutual anticipation of what the night could bring crackled between us. I suppressed the urge to grab her and instead squeezed her hand, motioning back towards the kitchen. “Let’s go chell on dinner.”

I led the way and her eyes widened, examining the room. I loved to cook and

had spared no expense when designing the space. The large room was lined in rich cherry cabinetry and painted a warm brown. The floors were covered in wide wooden planks and the soft recessed lighting was reflected in the polished stainless steel appliances and back splash. The counter tops were deep charcoal granite and I watched with rapt attention as she brushed her hand along the smooth surface.

“Its perfect,” she sighed, her eyes meeting mine across the center island. “Exactly like I imagined it would be.” I had returned to chopping the vegetables I had abandoned earlier, but paused as I heard her words.

“You’ve imagined what my apartment would look like?” I asked, unable to hide the surprise in my voice. She nodded, her gaze never leaving mine.

“Over and over.” Her statement hung in the air and my heart rate accelerated.

“How long?”

“Months.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. Placing the knife in my hand onto the cutting board, I walked around the island and stood in front of her. I reached out and smoothed a piece of hair before my fingers sunk into the silky strands and I pulled her to me.

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The sheer raw need I always felt when I touched her gripped me as our mouths came together.

Pulling back slightly, my tongue slipped between her open lips, and I moaned as a wave of lust began in my stomach and surged straight towards my cock. Pressing her back into the counter, I gripped her hair tightly in one hand and was rewarded with a throaty moan.

“Chloe, I wanted to take this slowly,” I murmured against her lips.

“Later.” Her breathless words ignited the lust I’d been trying to reign in and my cock hardened even more. No longer holding back, my fingers slid down her body and toyed with the hem of her dress, slowly beginning to move it up her thigh. My lips left hers, and I closed my eyes as I felt her hands move down my body, her fingers curling around the waist of my jeans.

“I like the dress,” I said against her neck. My hands slid up her body, lightly grazing her stomach under the fabric. My head fell to her shoulder as I encountered another layer of gauzy material. “Oh fuck, baby. What is this?” My hands encircled her ribs, and I moaned at the sensation of the silky material beneath my fingertips. Her soft laughter filled my ears, and I thanked God she

had a thing for underwear.

Turning her head slightly, her lips trailed along the side of my neck to my ear. “I like the jeans,” she whispered, her hot breath bringing goose bumps across my skin. Her grip tightened on my pants and I felt the backs of her fingers brush along my stomach, my muscles clenching in response.

My mouth met hers in another frantic kiss and in one quick movement, I pulled her dress up and off her body, tossing it across the room. I swore as my eyes moved across her curves, barely covered in the tiny black sshits of sheer fabric. Her hands gripped the bottom of my t-shirt and pulled it off, dropping it to the floor. Gripping her face, I pulled her mouth to mine, our tongues sliding against each other. I pressed into her, my aching cock now straining against my jeans. Running my fingers down her neck and shoulders, I let my hands travel down her smooth skin, stopping at the hem of the delicate material.

“I need you, Bennett,” she sighed into my mouth. In a frantic movement I pulled the camisole off, groaning at the feel of her bare breasts against my chest. Her fingers began working on the buttons of my jeans, my cock twitching each time she brushed against it. I felt the denim being pushed down my hips and my erection brushed against her stomach. With my hands on her hips, I turned her, running my fingertips up her body and placing her palms on the cool granite.

My cock pressed against her as I moved her hair over her shoulder, placing hot kisses along her back.

“Do you know how badly I want you right now, Chloe? All the things I want to do to you?” My hands traveled to her waist and down to the tiny straps holding her panties together. “What do you want?

Do you want me to take you?” She pushed herself back into me harder, and I moaned at the friction of my cock rubbing against the warm skin of her lower back. “Tell me, Chloe. Tell me to take you.”

She moaned loudly and her head fell back, her hair spilling across her shoulders and onto my chest. I groaned at the sensation and tightened my grip on her panties, using them to pull her roughly to me.

“These have to go Chloe,” I whispered into her ear. “They’re standing between me and something I want.” I ran the satin between my fingers and pulled slightly. “They’re very pretty,” I paused, brushing the soft skin beneath the strap. “But what’s underneath is even prettier.” I pulled roughly one last time and the thin material gave way easily, falling unceremoniously to the floor.

“You look so fucking sexy standing here naked in my kitchen in only those

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shoes," I murmured against her shoulder. I kicked away my jeans and ran my hand down her smooth thigh, silently asking her to make room for me. "Are you ready for me?" My hand slid between her thighs, her name falling from my lips as I felt the wetness there. I circled her clit slowly, closing my eyes as her breath caught and she leaned into my touch. My hand slipped further down and my cock twitched in anticipation at the heat that enveloped my fingers.

A low moan left her lips and she arched her body forward, causing her ass to press further against me. Withdrawing my fingers, I placed my hand between her shoulders and pushed her gently towards the counter, the tip of my cock now pressing against her entrance. Gripping her hips, I pulled her back onto me, both of us moaning loudly at the sensation as I slipped inside of her.

Without warning, she moved her hips forward and rocked back, once again taking me inside. The feeling was indescribable. I was completely surrounded by her. She whimpered my name and laid her head against the granite as I pulled out and thrust deeply back into her again.

Our bodies moved as one, pushing and pulling against each other, and I leaned forward to place kisses between her shoulder blades. She pushed her hips roughly back into me and I lifted my head to see her watching our reflection in the polished stainless steel of the refrigerator door. Our eyes met, and I swore loudly at the sight. Her breasts were pressed against the cold granite and I could see myself thrusting in and out of her, the force causing her body to rock forward with each movement.

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"Do you like that, Chloe?" I said to her reflection. She moaned loudly and the sound went straight to my cock. God, I loved her reaction to dirty talk.

"Oh, yes" she answered breathily, our gazes never faltering as I continued to rock into her.

"Oh fuck, Chloe," I cursed, my voice sounding hoarse and desperate. "You don't know how many times I've imagined this…imagined fucking you on every surface in my apartment. When I make you come, I'm going to take you back to my bed and do it all over again." The growing force inside me was building and I knew I couldn't hold on much longer.

"Touch me, Bennett. I'm so close." Groaning loudly, I clenched my jaw, her words making it nearly impossible to hold off my impending orgasm. My hand slid down her body to her clit and I clenched my eyes tightly as my fingers slipped easily across her slick pussy. I began rubbing against her and within seconds I felt her begin to tighten around me, I could feel myself slipping in and out of her and the knowledge of how perfectly we fit together sent me over the

edge.

“God, Chloe,” I moaned as she pressed herself back into me. Her back arched and with one last loud cry, she came hard around me. No longer needing to hold back I gripped her hips tightly and pulled her to me, her name leaving my lips over and over as I came inside of her.

Chloe collapsed against the counter top and I leaned forward, my lips running up and down her back, whispering her name. “It’s never been like this for me before,” I murmured as I placed my forehead against her damp skin. I wasn’t sure if the words were meant for her or me but it felt so right to say them out loud. Once my breathing had calmed I slipped out of her and turned her to face me. I looked deep into her brown eyes, and the thought of her leaving made me ache.

“Stay the night, Chloe.” Placing her hands on my face, she rose up onto her toes and placed her warm lips against mine.

“I’m not going anywhere.” She kissed me once more before pulling back to gaze at me. “Say it again, Bennett.” I knew exactly what she meant. Bending slightly at the knees, I lifted her body, smiling as she wrapped her legs around me. She encircled my neck with her arms and I turned, carrying her towards my bedroom with any thoughts of dinner long forgotten.

“Je suis { toi,” I said quietly as I lowered her to my bed. I looked at her against my sheets; her hair spread out around her and felt my chest expand. “You don’t know how many times I’ve dreamed of seeing you here.”

We lay facing each other in the darkness of my room, the city outside my windows casting enough of a glow to see her face. My hands toyed with her hair as she brushed her fingertips over my rough jaw.

The moment was perfect and I was finally ready to talk to her.

“Chloe,” I whispered, shivering as she traced her thumb along my bottom lip.

“Hmm?”

I removed a hand from her hair and placed in on her waist, my fingers brushing softly against her skin. “What do you want to do?” I paused, needing to clarify. “About this, about us?” Her hand stilled momentarily before she placed it on my hip.

“I don’t know.” Her voice was a mere whisper and I pulled her closer to me.

“I want to be with you, Chloe. Everything I said in Seattle is still true. I…” Emotion began to bubble up inside of me and I pulled her even closer, somehow

not being able to get close enough. I knew I was falling in love with her, but was I ready to say the words? More importantly, was she ready to hear them? “I care for you so much, Chloe. I want to go to your house and sleep on your pillows. I want to know what color your towels are and if you put your toaster away after you use it. You’re all I think about.” I looked into her eyes and saw tears there. “Hey, don’t cry.”

“I’m not crying,” she lied, smiling as my fingertips brushed away her tears. “I want you to know those things too. I love that you asked me to come here, and I want you to come to my house. But…” her voiced trailed off and she glanced away. *But?* My breath quickened and a sense of panic quickly took hold. “But can it just be *ours* for a while? Just the two of us?” Relief flooded through me as I registered what she’d said. She wanted me; she just wanted it to be ours for a while. I could handle that. I mean things were going great between us. We could keep it quiet and continue to see each other, and she could still work for me. We were both adults. It would work. There was no reason it shouldn’t.

I couldn’t keep from smiling as I closed the distance between us and kissed her lips. “Yes. It can be ours, for as long as you want.” I kissed her again and pulled away. “*Oui. Tu es mon confort*.”

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The moment our lips touched, my body began to stir. “I want you again,” I whispered into her mouth. She moaned softly, deepening our kiss while my hand moved from her waist to her thigh. I traced small circles along her skin before lifting her leg and hitching it up on my hip, aligning our bodies perfectly. I rocked against her, my cock moving easily between her legs. Angling her hips slightly, I rocked once more and I slid inside.

I’d never made love to a woman like this before, every inch of our bodies were pressed together or wrapped around each other. Our hands were free to explore, our mouths free to kiss. I felt connected to her in every way possible. Being with her like this was better than any fantasy I’d come up with.

Everyday it felt like I experienced something new with Chloe. I’d thought I’d been in love before, but I’d never felt this all consuming force, like if she walked away from me I’d never be whole again. I held her face in my hands and kissed her reverently, hoping to tell her with my body all the words I couldn’t say.

Her eyes closed and my name fell from her lips, her voice growing more urgent with every sweep of my mouth or touch of my hand. The pleasure of being inside of her had been building slowly; each rhythmic movement pushed us further and brought us closer.

“Bennett.” She said my name quietly, but so full of emotion that it made my

chest ache.

“I’m here, baby. I’m not letting go.” I tightened my hold on her, not sure who needed the reassurance more. She slid her free hand down to where mine rested on her hip and I pulled her closer to me, the power of being joined with her this way ready to consume us both. Our open mouths drifted together, close but never touching. Our muscles trembled, our bodies rocked, but no words were said as we came together in a powerful silence.

I closed the minute distance between our lips and kissed her deeply, each of us holding on to the other as we came back down. I couldn’t believe how much she had come to mean to me. She held my heart in her hand, and I wanted so badly to tell her. Slipping out of her body I sat up slightly and pulled the blankets over us before returning to her. Chloe smiled and sighed deeply, her eyes drifting closed. I ran my nose against the soft skin below her ear, attempting to memorize the smell and feel of her. Her breaths deepened and evened out and I knew that she was asleep. Brushing my lips once more across her skin, I pulled her tightly to me.

The knowledge that she couldn’t hear me allowed me to say what I desperately wanted to.

“I think I’m in love with you.”

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I awoke the next morning to the feel of fingers running softly through my hair. I sighed with contentment and pulled her closer as memories of last night flooded through my mind. I loved her.

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My eyes opened suddenly and I looked up, shocked to see her watching me.

“Morning,” she said softly as she continued to play with my hair.

“Morning,” I replied with a broad smile. *She stayed*. Pulling myself up her body I placed a kiss on her lips. “Thank you, Chloe,” I whispered, before reclaiming my spot on her bare breasts.

She exhaled softly before answering, “You’re welcome.” I closed my eyes and let it all sink in. She hadn’t run this morning, she was still here. We laid there quietly for a few minutes before I spoke.

“Would you like to shower with me?”

“Actually, I wanted to make you breakfast. Would that be okay?”

I looked up at her and placed my chin on her chest.

“I would love breakfast, Chloe.” She smiled widely and I moved up again to
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kiss her. I wanted to start every day like this.

Eventually we got up, and I headed for the shower while she went to the kitchen. Fifteen minutes later, showered and changed, I walked out. My heart nearly stopped as I saw Chloe standing over my stove, ladling batter onto a hot griddle… *in my shirt.* The mess from last night had been cleaned up, and I walked up behind her, placing my arms around her waist.

“You didn’t have to clean up.” I moved her hair and kissed her neck gently, smiling against her skin at the sound of her soft moan.

“I wanted to,” she answered. “Now go sit down, and I’ll bring this to you.” I chuckled and kissed her once more before walking away and taking a seat at the dining room table. I was looking at the paper when she walked in with a plate of pancakes, a cup of coffee, and a bottle of syrup in her hands. She carefully placed everything on the table and then surprised me by straddling my lap.

“Now this is what I call breakfast,” I laughed, placing my hands on her hips. She smiled and leaned forward, her lips lingering on mine.

“I agree.” Her lips were soft, and she tasted like toothpaste.

“Did you brush your teeth?” I asked curiously.

“Mmhmm, I always have one in my purse,” she answered, pouring the syrup over the large stack of pancakes.

“Oh my God. We *are* perfect for each other.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Just something Emmett said about you and I being more alike than I wanted to admit and it being the reason we didn’t get along,” I said distractedly, not able to get his words out of my head. “Did you know I-”

“Have one toothbrush in your desk drawer, two in your office bathroom, and one in your glove box?

Yep,” she answered, lifting a fork full of pancakes to my mouth. “I know most of your anal little habits.” I laughed and shook my head. She continued to feed me as I stole kisses between bites, groaning at the taste of syrup on her lips. My hands moved to her thighs and slipped under my shirt, pausing when I encountered only soft skin. I smirked at her and she shook her head.

“Someone ripped my panties last night.” She winked and I pulled her to me, breakfast all but forgotten.

“I’d like to lay you down on my table and pour that syrup all over you,” I whispered against her lips.

“Hmm, I don’t know. You’d get all sticky and you’ve already showered,” she teased.

“Oh, I think it’d be worth it.” She laughed against my mouth and I felt my affection for her grow. I never thought it would be so easy to be with her.

My cell phone began ringing but I ignored it, not willing to let the outside world intrude. The only person I wanted to talk to was sitting right here with me.

“Bennett, will you teach me how to say something in French?” I pulled away slightly and looked at her in surprise.

“Of course,” I answered, thrilled that she asked. “What did you want to know?” She reached behind me and pulled a piece of paper from her purse.

“This,” she said quietly. I looked at her for a moment, before taking the small piece of paper from her hand.

With you I’m finally home.

My eyes flew to hers as the meaning of those words hit me. Did she-was she saying what I thought she was? I looked down at the words written in her beautiful handwriting.

“Oh, Chloe,” I whispered, knowing I would never forget this moment. Looking up I slid my hand into her hair, my thumb brushing gently against her cheek. “Avec toi, je suis enfin { la maison.” I said the words slowly, my gaze never leaving hers.

“*Avec toi… je suis enfin. . à la maison?* ” she asked nervously.

“Perfect.” I cradled her face in my hands and kissed her gently, hoping to convey every ounce of love I felt for her. Our mouths moved perfectly together. I never wanted to let her go. We broke apart moments later, her hand lifting to caress my jaw.

“Bennett,” she began, only to be interrupted by a loud pounding on my door. Our eyes met, panic evident in both our expressions.

“Bennett!” Emmett’s booming voice carried to us from the hallway, followed by another round of knocks. “Bennett, I know you’re in there, asshole, I heard your cell phone ringing. I’m not leaving until you open this door.”

FIFTEEN – Murmurs

“Bennett!”

My breath caught in my throat and I met his wide eyes. This couldn’t be happening. Another round of knocks caused me to jump as Emmett’s fist collided with the apartment door.

“Bennett, I know you’re in there, asshole, I heard your cell phone ringing. I’m not leaving until you open this door.”

I cringed at the look of sheer panic stretching Bennett’s features. How was it that just a few hours ago, everything had been perfect? Fear seized me, constricting my chest, and I realized I needed more time. I thought I’d known what people finding out would entail. I’d always known that somehow this day would come, but it seemed like a vague image off in the future. I wasn’t ready yet.

“He means it.” Bennett’s voice brought me back and I met his eyes. The tension in his body was evident from the way his fingers dug almost painfully into my hip. He looked terrified. Taking his face between my palms, I leaned in and pressed my lips lightly to his. His eyes closed and I felt him relax slightly beneath me.

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“It’ll be fine. I’ll just step into your room and wait while you talk to him. Okay?”

“But, Chloe. I don-”

I cut him off before he could finish.“It’s fine, Bennett. Really.”

He was silent for a moment as a myriad of different emotions crossed his face and with a resigned sigh, he nodded and helped me off his lap. Turning to walk away, I was stopped as warm fingers wrapped around my forearm and pulled me back to him. He dipped his head, his mouth colliding with mine. His kiss was hungry, full of the need and desperation we each felt. Emmett’s persistent knocking and the ringing of Bennett’s cell phone on the table faded into the background as I lost myself in him. Rising to my toes, I tried to get closer, needing to calm the growing fear inside my chest. His strong arms encircled me tightly, and I felt myself being lifted slightly off the floor.

The kiss slowly changed into something more controlled. He pressed his lips lightly to mine and lingered before setting me down, my feet once again finding

the cool wooden floorboards. His eyes remained closed as he pressed his forehead to mine.

“Do you remember what you asked me last night?” I knew without thinking what he was referring to: keeping it ours.

“Yes,” I whispered softly.

“I promise. My answer is yes, as long as you want. Just remember that.” Guilt pulled at my stomach, and I wondered if he was only doing this for me.

“I don’t un-” I started, only to be cut off by another round of banging and Emmett’s now obviously annoyed voice.

“I swear to God, Bennett. I can hear your shit phone, and you never even go to the bathroom without that thing.”

Stepping away, I nodded and crossed the apartment to his bedroom, closing and locking the door behind me. My breaths were quickened and seemed to be amplified by the stillness of the apartment.

Pressing my ear to the door, I closed my eyes and listened. I heard a shuffling followed by the metal click of a lock being released, and I held my breath at the sound of the door opening.

Silence. Why was it so quiet?

“What the fuck do you want, Emmett? It’s Sunday morning.” Bennett’s tone was clipped and laced with anger as he addressed his brother.

“Don’t you fucking take that tone with me, asshole. You think I haven’t noticed that you’ve been avoiding me?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Emmett.” I heard slight movement, but I struggled to hear the source.

“Chloe.”

The silence that followed sent chills up and down my spine.

“What about her?” Bennett’s voice had changed, and the tone I recognized as that of “Mr. Ryan” now filtered through the door. I felt a prickle of sweat break out across my forehead as I listened to that familiar sound.

“Don’t play stupid with me, Bennett. I know something’s going on between you.”

“And what exactly would that be? She’s my employee and I’m her boss. Nothing more.”

I closed my eyes as a wave of nausea washed over me. *He doesn’t mean it. He*

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doesn't mean it.

"Well, that's the way it *should* be, but somehow I don't think that's the way it *is*."

"You have no idea what you're talking about."

I heard Emmett scoff, or at least I thought it was Emmett.

"I never thought you'd be this stupid, Bennett."

"Emmett, if you have something to say, then fucking say it and get the hell out."

"I think you're seeing Chloe."

Bennett didn't miss a beat.

"You're wrong."

"Am I?"

"Yes, Emmett. You're wrong. Ms. Mills and I have nothing more than a professional relationship."

My eyes closed at the word "relationship". His voice was cool, and I could tell even from behind the door that the Beautiful Bastard was commanding the room. I wasn't surprised, but as I searched his voice for a trace of regret, it hurt to find none.

"Do you think I'm that stupid? I know how you two were together. I've never seen two people who hated each other more. I watched you act like a complete asshole to her everyday for almost a year and then all of a sudden, you're ogling her like a starving man looks at a piece of meat. I think something happened while you two were in Seattle and *that's* why you were avoiding my calls. I also think you were texting her yesterday."

I couldn't let him do this alone. I placed my hand on the knob and turned it slightly.

"You have no idea what you're talking about. You can go now, Emmett."

"So, what? You're just fucking her then? Because I will kick the shit out of you for taking advantage of her like that."

"It's not like that." For the first time, I heard a hint of hesitancy slip into Bennett's voice and I wondered if he was speaking to Emmett or himself.

"What the hell is that supposed to mean, Bennett? Either you are or you aren't."

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“Holy shit, Emmett! How many times do I need to tell you there’s nothing going on? Do you really think *I’m* that stupid? She means nothing to me!”

My hand fell from the door and I stepped back, the sound of his words echoing in my ears. A flash of pain ripped through my chest and I closed my eyes, feeling the sudden need to sit down. My rational mind understood why he said it, but every fear in my heart was reinforced by his words. Sitting on the edge of the bed, I closed my eyes tightly as I tried to suppress the forming tears. *He doesn’t mean it. This is what you asked him to do.*

It was silent for a moment on the other side before Emmett spoke.

“You’re really serious, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” he answered quietly, but in a firm tone.

“Look, man. I’m sorry about this. I just…I thought…never mind. Fuck. I know you wouldn’t lie to me, I should have known better.”

An uncomfortable silence filled the apartment. I was aware of the quiet hum of the air conditioner and the ticking from the clock in the living room. Everything seemed so still, only amplifying the guilt I felt inside. The sound of a cell phone from the other side of the door broke the silence, as my familiar ringtone filled the apartment.

Oh God.

“Bennett, *your* phone’s in your hand, so whose just rang in the kitchen?” Emmett asked in a confused voice. I held my breath and it seemed as if hours passed in the seconds that followed before he answered.

“It’s not what you think.”

“Wait, is someone here?” My heart was literally pounding out of my chest as I waited to be caught.

“God, Bennett, why didn’t you say you had someone here and tell me to shut the fuck up?”

I heard him laugh softly. “Yeah, why didn’t I think of that?” His voice was quiet and I had to strain to hear him. They spoke in hushed tones for a few moments and I stood up, quickly replacing his shirt with my dress from last night, thankful I had remembered to bring it in there that morning. The sound of a door closing was followed by a soft knock.

“Chloe?” Crossing the room, I quickly opened the door and gave him a forced smile before returning to the bed and strapping on my shoes.

“Hey,” he started hesitantly, propping himself against the door frame. “You

know why I said all that, don't you?"

"What? Oh, of course I do. Don't worry about it," I answered, doing my best to convince us both.

He stared at me for a moment as I gathered my things.

"Then where are you going?"

"Oh…I…uh, forgot I have this thing…with Alice this morning," I replied, waving my hand dismissively.

"It's nothing really, just something I forgot about until I heard her ringtone out there. Sorry about that, by the way."

I stood and walked towards the doorway, still avoiding his gaze. His scent washed over me as I brushed by him, his shoulder coming into contact with my own.

"Look at me."

The agonized tone of his voice halted me in my tracks and I turned slowly, watching as he approached.

"We're okay, right?" His right hand came up and held my face gently, his thumb tracing soft circles across my skin.

"Of course we are." I nodded and leaned in, lightly pressing my mouth to his. I breathed him in, trying to soothe the doubt that had been sparked inside me. A low moan escaped his lips, and he gripped me tighter.

"I want to see you again tonight," he whispered against my mouth. "My bed will feel so empty without you in it." My stomach fluttered at his words. "Please, Chloe."

"You don't fight fair," I whispered as his hands moved to my hair.

"As long as it gets me you, I don't care." His lips brushed against mine softly and I realized once again that despite the battle between my head and my heart, or how much it would hurt in the end, I was his.

Pulling away slightly, I looked into his eyes. "I have to go." He nodded and led me to the door, retrieving my phone from the kitchen and my purse from the front closet. A wisp of the earlier tension crackled between us as we stood awkwardly at the door.

"You're sure we're okay?" His knees bent slightly as he brought his face level with mine, confusion evident in his eyes." I know what that must have sounded like and I-"

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I placed my finger over his mouth to silence him.

“We’re fine,” I answered quietly, willing myself to hold it together just a bit longer. I kissed him once more and opened the door into the hall. Without waiting for a response, I started towards the elevator. Stepping inside, I pressed the button and looked up to see him standing in the doorway watching me. His expression was confused, and I pulled together a smile for him just as the doors closed.

Finally within the privacy of the lift, I pulled out my cell phone and pressed send.

“Alice?” I began, as the tears spilled down my cheeks.

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A few hours and a pint of Double Fudge Brownie later, I sat with my head on Alice’s lap as she stroked my hair. The crying had stopped and only the occasional sniffle remained. I’d tried to tell Alice everything over the phone, but after informing me that she wasn’t fluent in blubbering, she met me at my apartment.

“Okay, Chloe,” she began softly and my eyes drifted closed as her soothing actions calmed me. “I’m confused. The last conversation we had you said this was just sex, no big deal. What the hell happened?”

“I just…I love him, Alice,” I whispered, shaking my head. My heart rate sped up as I realized this was the first time I’d ever vocalized it.

“You *love* him?” she questioned, the shock evident in her voice. “When did this happen?”

“I don’t know. Seattle? Maybe before.” I turned my head and looked out the window, watching the trees sway in the breeze.

“Chloe, I’m confused. I thought you two hated each other?”

“I don’t know. Everything’s different, *he’s* different. It’s like the man I thought I knew doesn’t exist.”

Taking a deep breath, I told her everything. I explained to her that first night in Seattle, the way we fought and the things we’d confessed. I told her about our week together, the night at the pool, the day he was sick and how much it hurt to leave him at the airport. Finally, I told her about being with him last night, they way he made me feel, how close I’d been to telling him I loved him and what had happened this morning. To say she was shocked would be an understatement.
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“Chloe, I understand why you’re upset, honey. But you’re in love,” she said, smiling. “This isn’t a bad thing. So maybe the situation isn’t perfect, but whose is? When I met Jasper, I was traveling all the time and even though I knew I didn’t have time for a relationship, I also knew I couldn’t be without him. We knew we belonged together and found a way to make it work.”

“Alice,” I began, sitting up to face her. “It’s not that simple. This isn’t about a busy schedule or not wanting to be with him. I feel like everything is against us. I work for him. Without even touching on the fact that technically, we should both be fired, I’ve been lying to people I love, people I respect, who’ve taken me in like family.” I shook my head in disgust as I recalled that morning.

“I’m a grown woman and this morning I hid in his bedroom while he lied to his brother for me. I knew what he needed to say, but it just hurt so fucking bad to actually hear the words.” My voice trailed off and I looked away, unable to stand the pity I saw in her eyes.

“But Chloe, what if he does love you? He was only doing what you asked him to.”

“Let’s say for argument’s sake that Bennett did love me, then what? I fucked my boss, Alice. I don’t want to be known as *that* woman. You know, there was someone the year I started that had an affair with one of the executives. They were both reprimanded and the case closed, but it was never over for her. It’s been years now, but whenever someone brings her up, they always refer to her as ‘the one who slept with her boss.’”

“Okay, then let’s start looking for a solution. What if you left before anyone found out? Worked for someone else?”

“No,” I protested instantly.

“And why not?” she asked, a bewildered expression on her face. I stood and walked to my dresser, needlessly rearranging the pink tulips placed in a vase there.

“Because,” I answered, knowing how childish that sounded.

“I’m afraid I’m going to need something a bit more solid than ‘because’ Chloe.”

“Well,” I started. “For one, I really love my job. I’m good at what I do and I know it. I’ve worked really hard to build the trust they have in me.”

“Okay…Chloe, you sound like you’re telling me about your resume, not why you won’t sacrifice to be with the man you love.”

“And…I guess I worry that it will change. That without this, we’ll change. It will fade or be different.

And I’m terrified what will happen when I don’t see him everyday.”

“You don’t really believe that, do you?”

“I don’t know,” I began, still trying to put my thoughts together. “Alice? Have you ever known him to have a girlfriend?”

“No, but then I don’t know as much about him as you do. Why?”

“When I was in Seattle, I went out to dinner with a couple of the girls I usually see at these things, and I asked them.” I looked over my shoulder to see her watching me.

“And?”

“They said there was someone. Her name was Rachel and apparently they were together for a long time. Everyone thought they would get married and then one day it was over and he ended up back in Chicago. Nobody knows why.”

“And what? People break up all the time, Chloe. Everyone has past relationships. Why does his bother you?”

“It’s just that the way we started didn’t allow for any of that my past-his past talk. And here we are, with all these *feelings* and I have no idea if we’re even on the same page. Like, I didn’t even hear about his ex-girlfriend from *him*, I heard it through the grapevine. How serious can we be if we haven’t even had that talk yet? And I can’t explain it, but for some reason I get the feeling that it’s important.”

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“Well,” she began, standing from the bed. “We’ll ask Rosalie tomorrow at lunch.” I turned quickly to her, watching her eyes widen as she saw my expression. “Chloe? What is it?”

“Oh God, Alice. I’d forgotten all about Rosalie. I haven’t seen her since… well, since *the last time*.”

Dropping on the bed, I put my head in my hands, remembering the look on Rosalie’s face as the bathroom door opened.

“Calm down, Chloe. Shit. Look, she obviously didn’t tell Emmett or he wouldn’t have given up this morning. Maybe she’s on your side?” I moaned into my hands in response. “Well, you said he believed Bennett, right?”

“I guess,” I answered unenthusiastically.

“So there you go. If his wife had told him that she actually caught you two in

the act, I don't think he would have listened."

"She didn't catch us *in the act*, Alice."

"You know what I mean." Taking my hands in hers, she sat next to me on the bed, a determined expression on her face. "I'm just going to put my two cents in and be done. I know you're scared, Chloe, and I understand that. But *what if?* What if he does love you? I know it might be hard, but it could also be great." I listened to her words and felt a familiar, albeit distant spark of hope flicker in my chest.

"You need to ask yourself if he's worth taking that chance for. Don't you think he might be worth it?"

Later that night, with Alice's words still fresh on my mind, I exited the elevator and slowly made my way down the hall to Bennett's apartment. I knew in my heart that Alice was right, but that didn't make it any easier. Was I ready to tell him? This was still so new and I wanted to be able to enjoy it a bit longer before letting in the rest of the world and their opinions. As I continued down the hall, I felt my body relax with every step I took toward his apartment. Just as before, it seemed to know what I needed long before my head figured it out.

Within seconds of knocking, the door was open and I was in hisarms. "God, I missed you."

I felt his words as his lips brushed against my hair and I couldn't help how they made me smile.

Pressing my face into his chest, I inhaled deeply, greedily taking in his scent.

"I missed you, too," I said, placing my chin against him and looking up into his face. *God, he was beautiful.*

"Come on," he suggested, pulling me further in and shutting the door behind us. "I made dinner, and the movie is ready to go."

I smiled and followed him into the kitchen, unable to stop myself from admiring the way his jeans sat low on his hips and remembering how the soft skin there felt under my fingertips. We entered the familiar kitchen, and I bit my lip to suppress a smile as my mind drifted back to the last time we were there. Dinner looked wonderful, and I didn't object when he took my purse from me and handed me a plate full of food with a quick kiss.

"Bennett, this looks amazing. You certainly don't cook like a typical bachelor." I inhaled deeply. It smelled better than it looked, and my mouth watered. He dished up his own plate and took my hand.

“Well, most bachelors didn’t live in France for six years, and there are many things I like to do in the kitchen, Chloe.” he answered with a smirk. I rolled my eyes as he continued. “I learned to cook, one of the many benefits of living there.”

We sat down next to each other on the couch, and he started the movie.

“Bennett, you always sound so happy when you talk of living in Paris. Why did you leave?” I could have been imagining it, but I thought I noticed him tense at my question.

“Oh, no reason really. It was just time to come home.”

I nodded and leaned back against the couch considering his answer as the opening credits of *Rear Window* began. Realizing he had remembered my favorite movie, I looked up at him with a smile. He laughed and pulled me against his side, his arm draping across my shoulder. We finished eating and as the movie played, we drifted closer. I turned towards him, my head on his chest, my leg across his and my arm resting on his stomach. My fingers drew lazy circles across his abdomen and I smiled as I felt the muscles clench under my touch. His chin sat atop my head and every once in a while something warm would press against my hair.

At some point I fell asleep and awoke to find Bennett undressing me and placing me into his bed. His warm body slipped in beside me, and I turned into him; drawn into the feel of his warm, bare skin pressed against mine. My lips brushed against his chest and his arms encircled me tightly. “Bennett,”

I whispered into the darkness.

“Shhh. I’m right here, baby. Just go back to sleep.” His voice was deep and soothing and I snuggled into him more, feeling safe and wanted and the happiest I’d ever been in my life. For the first night since this whole thing started, Bennett and I simply held each other and fell asleep in one another’s arms.

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When Monday morning dawned, it brought with it the realization of what today would mean.

Today I would sit at the same desk I’d sat at for almost a year, speak to the same people, but everything would be different.

I would watch him walk in and head towards his office, knowing what happened between us there, but unsure of how it would fit in. I would know what it felt like to feel him naked against me, to feel his tender touches and hear
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whispered words of affection, but have to keep it all hidden. Would he look at me the same? Touch me when we were alone?

Would he call me Chloe?

I slipped out from underneath him and placed a kiss on his lips, knowing I needed to get home. He stirred and mumbled my name, his arms searching out to find me before gripping a pillow and rolling onto his stomach. I swept his hair from his face and leaned in to place one last kiss against his shoulder before setting the alarm on his cell phone, and typing a little note about where I'd gone.

Despite everything, I smiled as I left his apartment and headed to the parking garage.

A few hours later I sat at my desk with Angela, attempting to make some sort of sense out of the mess that the various temps had left for me. The office door opened and Bennett walked in. My breath caught and I had to quickly compose myself as I watched him enter in his black suit, unable to ignore the way the fabric accentuated his long, lean body.

"Good morning, Mr. Ryan," Angela and I said in unison.

"Did you have a nice time in Seattle, Mr. Ryan?" Angela questioned, pivoting herself in her chair to face him. I bit my lip to keep from smiling as he looked from her to me.

"Yes. I had a wonderful time, Ms. Weber. It was very…enlightening," he answered smoothly, his eyes lingering on me. "Ms. Mills, may I speak to you in my office for a moment?"

"Of course," I replied coolly. I stood and glanced at Angela. "I'll be right back."

Shaking her head, she smiled and mouthed the words "good luck," before returning her attention to the folders spread out on the desk. Bennett waited, holding his office door for me, meeting my gaze as I preceded him inside. The moment the door clicked softly behind us he grabbed me, his lips hungrily searching out mine.

"You left," he whispered as his mouth moved down my neck. "I don't want you to do that again."

"I left you a note," I answered breathily, my eyes practically rolling back into my head as he moved to the front of my blouse.

"Yes. I found your little note, tease." I stifled a laugh as I remembered what I had added along with my explanation. "You're not allowed to leave me in the

morning without waking me up and kissing me goodbye, deal?" He pulled away slightly and our eyes met, the seriousness of his expression surprising me.

"Deal."

"Good, and since I don't remember my goodbye kiss, you'd better give it to me now." I smiled as I leaned in to kiss him, my eyes closing as his soft lips pressed against mine. He kissed me tenderly before pulling away and looking into my eyes. "Chloe," he whispered before cradling my face in his hands and bringing his mouth to mine once again. My lips parted and I moaned softly as his tongue slipped inside, the familiar feel of him making me forget that we were in his office and Angela was right outside the door. His hands slipped from my face, down my shoulders and along my back to my skirt, cupping my ass. He pulled me to him and groaned. "What do you have on under here today? I don't feel anything but a garter belt."

"Maybe that's all there is," I teased. He groaned loudly and pressed his forehead to mine.

"Have lunch with me today."

"I can't. I'm having lunch with Rosalie and Alice." He lifted his head and looked at me.

"Rosalie?" he questioned. I nodded and he shook his head slightly. "I'm sorry, Chloe."

"There's nothing to be sorry about. Everything will be fine." He nodded but seemed unconvinced.

I was about to respond when the phone in the outer office rang. "I need to get back," I added, leaning in to kiss him again. He returned it and watched me leave, a strange expression on his face.

The day turned out to be busier than I expected and before I knew it, the outer door opened and a small body collided with my legs.

"Chloe!" An excited squeal filled the room, and I glanced down to see a head full of shiny curls with a familiar grin looking up at me.

"Ms. Carrington!" I squealed back, picking up the little girl and placing her on my lap. "Where's your mommy?"

"Wight there," she answered, pointing to the open door. Just then, a frazzled, yet still gorgeous Rosalie walked in.

"There you are, little munchkin. How in the world she moves so fast on such chubby little legs is beyond me."

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“She was just excited to get into my treasure drawer, weren’t you?” I asked, thankful that the little girl could be a buffer between Rosalie and I. Carrington clapped excitedly before reaching over and opening the familiar drawer I kept stocked for her. She searched through the contents before holding out two chubby little fingers.

“I can have two?” she asked.

“Hmm.” I paused as if considering, trying to stifle my laughter at her pleading expression. “I’ll make you a deal. You can have two, but I get two kisses. Deal?” The little girl bounced happily before leaning up and wrapping her little arms around me, kissing my cheek twice.

“Uncle Ben!” I turned quickly to find Bennett standing in the doorway watching us, a mischievous grin on his face. Carrington bolted from my lap and rushed to him. He picked her up and threw her in the air before showering her with kisses.

“How is my CareBear doing today?” he asked, running his hands lovingly through her golden hair.

“Miss Chloe was giving me tweasures,” she said, pointing to me.

“She was? Well you better go get them.” He carried her over and knelt down while she searched my drawer, finally deciding on lip gloss and stickers. I saw Bennett’s eyes go from the drawer to me, a questioning expression on his face.

“Chloe always has treasures for you, doesn’t she CareBear?” Rosalie added from across the room. The little girl nodded and kissed my cheek again before climbing back into her uncle’s arms. Bennett’s expression was one of shock but he didn’t comment as he stood.

“Well,” he started, looking at Carrington. “I may not be as pretty as Ms. Chloe, but I may have something for my little CareBear if she’s been a good girl.”

“Jolie,” she whispered, her fingers touching his shiny, messy hair. He laughed as he nodded.

“Yes. Jolie, pretty. Can you tell me more?” He pointed to her nose.

“Le nez!” she shouted.

“Magnifique, ma petite cherie! Eyes?” he asked, his finger lightly brushing over her eyes.

“Les yeux,” she answered after a moment of thought. I looked at Rosalie, who shook her head at me.

“They do this every time they see each other.” I turned back to them and watched, amazed to see this side of Bennett. It seemed strange now to realize that I had never actually seen them together, Rosalie or Emmett always took her straight into his office after visiting me, and he never came out.

“Très bien. Mouth?” She scrunched her face up as she thought.

“La bouche!” she exclaimed, obviously thrilled with herself. “Present now?” She looked at him pleadingly and returned to winding her fingers through his hair.

“Now how can I resist the prettiest girl in the whole world,” he answered, winking at me as he turned towards his office. The sound of her squealing drew me to his door and I watched as he sat at his desk while blowing raspberries on her neck. She laughed and he placed her on his lap, pulling a beautifully wrapped gift from a bottom drawer.

” *Bennett*,” Rosalie warned. He waved her off, watching as Carrington began pulling the satin bow topping the gift. “He always does this, buys her things that are far too expensive for a little girl. He spoils her rotten.”

“Oh shush, Rosalie. How could I possibly spoil the most beautiful little girl in the world?” he said against her hair. I watched as he helped her remove the shiny paper and pulled from the box the most beautiful pink dress I’d ever seen.

“Bennett!” Rosalie shouted. Carrington’s mouth fell open in awe as her little hands touched the delicate fabric.

” *Jolie*,” she whispered reverently.

“Yes, *very* pretty. I thought you might like a new dress for our next tea party. Do you like it?” She wrapped her arms around his neck and they spoke to each other in hushed tones, seemingly oblivious that there were others in the room.

“Come on, Chloe. This will go on and on. Let’s get to lunch. Bennett,” she called back to him. “If she gets to be too much, take her to Emmett.”

I nodded, but found it nearly impossible to pull myself away from the sight of Bennett and the little girl, as things I’d never imagined began running through my mind.

“Chloe?” I turned to find Rose standing next to the door, waiting for me, and reluctantly pulled myself away.

The drive to the restaurant was slightly awkward, and I hoped I might get out of having to talk to her about what happened, until Rosalie broke the silence.

“I need to apologize.” I turned to her in disbelief. “I know, I know, shocking.”

She sighed deeply and looked as if she were still formulating what she wanted to say. “Chloe, I’m very protective of my family, but…even *I* can admit that I may have overreacted. I still don’t agree with what you two were doing… or should I say *where* you were doing it…” She paused, seemingly grossed out for a moment but soon recovered. “But you’re both adults, and it’s really none of my business.”

I smiled at her, silently accepting her apology.

“I’m assuming though that it’s over?” She looked at me questioningly. *Shit.* I swallowed loudly and tried to formulate a believable response.

“I knew it,” she said shaking her head.

“Knew what?” I asked uncomfortably.

“I love my husband, but he can be such an idiot sometimes. You were in Bennett’s apartment yesterday, weren’t you?”

I looked down, debating lying, before deciding to just stick with the truth.

“Yes,” I answered.

“Huh,” was her only response. I waited for her to say something else, but she didn’t. We drove in silence, both of us lost in our own thoughts. My stomach churned and I was grateful I hadn’t eaten today.

“You two aren’t very good at hiding it, you know.”

“I’m sorry, Rose. You have no idea how badly I feel about lying to everyone.”

“I just don’t understand, Chloe. All this,” she said, motioning with her hands. “For sex? I mean, the sex can’t be so amazing that you’d risk your job, not to mention your reputation.”

All it took was that slight hesitation, that one minor change of my expression as I met Rosalie’s eyes, and it was clear that she knew.

” *Chloe*,” she sighed heavily and shook her head. She ran her hands through her long hair and leaned back against the seat. “How did I know this would happen?” She spoke quietly, more to herself than me and I suddenly found myself wanting to confide in her.

“I have no idea,” I answered, as I watched the buildings pass by.

“Chloe, I just… Don’t get me wrong, I love Bennett…” she trailed off and I could see her struggling with her loyalty to her brother-in-law and her friendship with me.

“Rosalie, who’s Rachel?” I blurted out, surprising even myself.

FLOOKFOXCLUSIVE

“Oh boy. Why couldn’t this conversation have happened at the restaurant with alcohol,” she replied, shaking her head with a soft chuckle. “Okay, where to begin?” I watched her intently, practically holding my breath waiting for her response.

“Rachel was Bennett’s girlfriend in Paris and as far as everyone knew, they were the real deal. Rachel was a model and Bennett was this gorgeous playboy- they were in every magazine, attended every fancy event, the perfect couple. In short, we were all waiting for the envelope in the mail telling us where to show up for the wedding. So one day, Emmett comes in with this really serious look on his face and I kind of freaked. I mean, Emmett never looks like that. It turns out, Rachel told Bennett that she wanted more. She wanted that wedding and a house and kids and he just… broke it off. Before we knew it, there was a blurb in the company newsletter that Bennett was coming home and you were going to be his new assistant.”

I watched as Rose looked at me, waiting for some type of response. I nodded slowly, appearing on the outside to be calm and collected, but inside my thoughts were racing a mile a minute.

My heart pounded in my chest as I thought of that poor girl whom I couldn’t help but relate to and admire. To have the courage to tell him she wanted to build a life together and in turn have him walk away and leave her on the other side of the world.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

“Chloe?”

I turned to Rosalie, instantly aware that she could see my internal struggle. “Chloe, are you okay?”

“Yeah. I’m fine,” I answered, trying to clear my head. “I think I already knew it was something like that.”

“Do you love him?”

From my peripheral vision I saw her turn towards me. I felt lightheaded and could only manage a nod in response.

“And does he love you?”

Did he love me?

“I…I don’t know. I don’t know if it’s like that for him,” I answered, my fingers tracing over the charms on my bracelet. “I know he cares for me, but he’s never said the words.”

“I don’t want you to misunderstand me. I’ve seen him with Carrington. I’d

even seen him with Rachel.

He loved her, Chloe. I saw it, we all did, but it…somehow, it wasn't enough. He's a wonderful man and capable of so much love-I just don't want to see you get hurt." She took a deep breath before continuing.

"I saw her a couple of months after he left and she was a total mess. She never saw it coming. I…" she trailed off and I felt goose bumps spread across my skin. I'd never once seen Rose at a loss for words.

"I just don't want to see you risk everything for a man who may never want the same things." She spoke slowly, considering each word as she said it, and I felt my heart sink with every one.

My hands were trembling slightly, and I clasped them in my lap. Was she telling me anything I didn't already know? The details were new, but the sentiment wasn't. She was basically confirming everything I had feared at some point or another, that what we had was wonderful but wouldn't really be enough to hold him. I'd asked him to keep this between us for me, but he'd never resisted or given any indication that he *wanted* people to know. He'd never hinted at wanting me to switch positions so we could have more.

He was fine with hiding.

"I understand, Rose," I answered dully as we pulled up to the restaurant. She watched me worriedly as she shut off the engine. "Don't worry, you haven't told me anything I didn't already know. I'll be careful." I gave her a reassuring smile and she reached over to squeeze my hand before climbing out.

All through lunch I went through the motions; responding when questioned, laughing when necessary, but never really participating. My head was swimming with everything Rose had said. I knew she was right. She basically warned me that I was headed for heartbreak, but hadn't I known that already? I loved him and wanted him, and regardless of the warning bells that had been sounding all day, I knew I couldn't stay away.

Was this what happened when you were truly in love? Did you stop listening to reason and push forth regardless of the outcome?

We were just finishing up lunch when my phone vibrated. Rose and Alice were looking through a sample catalogue and didn't notice my surprised expression when I saw a text from Bennett.

This little girl wants to know when you're coming back.

I couldn't keep the smile from my lips as I read. I glanced up at Rosalie, but

she was deep in conversation with Alice. I was tired of fighting this. Keeping my heart from him now proved as difficult as keeping my body from him had been in the beginning. Exhaling deeply and blowing my bangs off my forehead, I decided to push aside all my doubts for now and just enjoy this.

Oh she does, does she?

Yes. She also wants to know what you're doing tonight.

I took a deep breath, thinking back on what he'd said. He wanted to come to my apartment, and dammit, I wanted him there. I'd had more fantasies of seeing him in my bed than I cared to acknowledge. I also knew that by having him over I was making a decision. Once I saw him there, he would never leave. Regardless of where he was physically, he would always be there.

Hmm. I was hoping to have a gorgeous man over for dinner.

Do I know this gorgeous man? Because if I don't I may have to object.

I stifled a laugh as I considered my response. We'd done nothing but sleep last night and I knew that if he came over tonight, *sleeping* would not be on the plan. I typed my response and chewed my lower lip, debating on whether or not to send it. Taking a deep breath and closing my eyes, I pressed the green button.

I think you do. Tall, sexy, cock like a work of art, makes me come like I've never come before.

A full minute passed without a response and I wondered if I'd said the wrong thing. When my phone vibrated again, I practically pounced on it.

Shit, Chloe. What time?

I smiled, feeling slightly empowered by his response. I could almost picture the way he would have closed his eyes and let his head fall back against his chair. Not to mention another reaction I hopefully incited.

7.. Don't be late.

I REALLY don't think that's gonna be a problem.

I giggled as I read his next text and heard a throat clear, glancing up to see I had gotten Alice's attention. Rose was on her phone with Emmett and Alice smiled at me, knowing who I was texting without needing to ask. I started to envision a plan for tonight, one where we were on my turf and I was in charge.

Good. I don't want to have to punish you.

Is it 7 yet?

I covered my mouth to hide my laughter, just as Rose hung up and looked at

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

me.

“That was Emmett. He and Bennett have to go, so Daddy Carlisle has CareBear with him. I better go grab her before she breaks everything in his office.” We paid the bill and hugged goodbye, promising to see each other again soon. I moved ahead to the door and typed a response to him while Alice and Rose exchanged contact info.

A few more hours.

I’m counting down. I miss you already.

The butterflies in my stomach leapt into action as I read his message.

I miss you too.

I have to leave for a meeting, I want a kiss the minute I see you. Deal?

“Ready?” Rose asked, as she met me near the door. I looked at her and smiled genuinely for the first time all afternoon.

“I think I am,” I answered, surprising myself at how calm I felt. Rose led the way to the car and I messaged him one last time before heading back to the office.

Deal.

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Because of traffic, I walked into my apartment exactly fifteen minutes before he was due. Rushing to the bathroom, I touched up my make-up and made a quick chell to ensure everything looked perfect.

Dinner would have to be take-out. I pulled out the menus and began to go through them just as the doorbell rang. My heart quickened as I stood from the counter and walked to the door.

Peering through the peep-hole, I swore silently. He stood with his hand in his hair, his suit jacket gone and the sleeves of his white dress shirt rolled up past his elbows. The overhead lighting caught the glint of gold in his hair and cast him in a warm glow. I took a deep breath knowing already there was no way that this man was going to spend any time here tonight outside of my bedroom.

I opened the door and without a word he approached me, placing a hand on each side of my face and pulling me to him. The instant his parted lips touched mine, we both moaned. My senses were on overload and I was lost to everything but him; his scent as it swirled around me, the taste of his tongue as it slid against mine, the sounds falling from his lips and the hardness of his body as it pressed against me.

EDOM EXCLUSIVE
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“Baby, I’ve been waiting for this all day.” His words fanned moist air across my lips, and I pulled back slightly, needing to see him.

“Then why are you late?” I asked with false severity. He looked at me confused before glancing at his watch.

“What are you talking about? I’m not late. I texted you and said traffic was bad, it’s only-” I quirked an eyebrow at him.

“You’re. Late.” My words were clear and deliberate and I watched him, waiting for recognition to dawn. *Play along, Bennett.*

“You’re right. I *am* late. Didn’t you say something about being punished?” he asked with a smirk, as the realization obviously took hold. *Good boy*.

“I did.” Bringing my hand to his chest, I watched as I ran my fingers slowly up and down the soft material of his shirt, feeling the hard muscle flex underneath my touch. I brought my eyes back up to meet his, watching as his nostrils flared and his chest rose and fell with the increased force of his breathing. Gripping his tie in my hands, I wrapped it once around my fist, raising an eyebrow as a small moan escaped his chest. Twisting it around once more, I tugged, pulling him forward slightly.

“God, Chloe.”

“Follow me.” I took a step backwards, pulling him with me and loving how he didn’t seem to mind giving up control anymore. I took another step and he followed willingly. Smiling to myself, I turned slowly, holding his tie firmly over my shoulder as I led the way to my bedroom.

“Sit,” I said as we entered, pointing to my bed. He did as I asked and I watched as his eyes scanned the room.

“This looks just like I imagined,” he said, his voice soft and slightly lower than normal.

“And how’s that?” I asked as I stood in the doorway, anxious and excited to hear that he had imagined my bedroom as I had his. He ran his hands over the pale pink and black edged duvet and down the white canopy that hung from the ceiling.

“It looks like you. Soft, feminine, sexy, sophisticated; exactly how I imagined. And I’d be lying if I said I hadn’t imagined it…a lot.” He looked up at me and anticipation encircled us. “I want you, Chloe. More than I’ve ever wanted anything. Undress for me.”

My heart almost leapt from my chest and I felt my nipples tighten at his

words.

Shaking my head, I smiled coyly at him. “I don’t think so. You’re not the one in charge here tonight.”

Without a word he stood, his hands moving to his tie, loosening the material before throwing it to the floor. Our eye contact never wavered as I brought my fingers up to the pins in my hair and removed them, letting it fall around my shoulders. We stood across the room from each other, and the thought occurred to me that I could either watch him undress, or be naked together. Without a second thought, the latter won out.

Almost in unison, our hands came to the front of our shirts, unfastening the buttons and pulling the material from our bodies, the soft rustle of fabric falling to the floor echoing in the stillness of the room. I bit my lip as he kicked off his shoes. Leaning down, I did the same, slipping my heels from my feet. His hands seemed to tremble slightly as they moved to the front of his pants, unzipping them slowly before sliding them down his hips. I’d been naked in front of him more times than I could count, but my own hands seemed unsteady as I moved to the clasp of my bra.

“You’re beautiful, Chloe.”

His voice brought me from my own insecurities, and I slipped the material off my shoulders, letting it slide down my arms to the floor. I felt a sense of pride as his breath caught and his gaze fell to my breasts. My hands moved to the zipper on the side of my skirt and I slid it down, the sound of the metal teeth bringing his attention back to my eyes.

EBOOKFOXLUSIVE

There was something so erotic about undressing this way in front of each other and not being able to touch. My body literally ached to feel his hands on my skin. Slowly, I slid the material of my skirt down my hips and kicked it away from me, leaving me in only my garter belt and stockings. He had bent to remove his boxer briefs and I bit my lip at the expression on his face when he stood and saw that I wasn’t wearing any panties.

“Just thought I’d surprise you,” I teased.

“So fucking beautiful.” His voice was hushed and reverent, almost worshipful as he brought his eyes back up to meet mine.

“So are you.”

“Come here, baby.” I took a deep breath and walked the few steps to where he stood, feeling drawn to him by some unseen force. I knew that I had found the man I would love for the rest of my life, and my heart ached to tell him. Taking

my face into his hands, he closed his eyes and placed his forehead against mine. “You’re everything I never knew to want. I wish I would have stopped fighting it.” He looked into my eyes and what I saw filled me with hope. “I wish I would have let you in sooner.”

He leaned in and placed his lips against mine and my heart almost broke with the love I felt for him. I wanted this and I would give up anything to have it for even just a little while. In that moment, I pushed every doubt and worry about what could happen or what people would say and gave myself to him. I was his anyway, even if he didn’t know it yet.

Rising up onto my toes I pressed myself closer to him, sighing as I felt the warmth of his body against my bare skin. His tongue traced along my lower lip before slipping into my mouth, the familiar taste of him causing my knees to shake slightly. His hand twisted into my hair, pulling me towards him while the other ghosted down my side to the underside of my breast. I shivered as his gentle touch ignited the nerve endings along my skin. He took my breast into his palm, cradling it, his thumb rubbing small circles over my nipple.

“So perfect,” he whispered, increasing the pressure of his touch. I brushed my cheek lightly along his angled jaw, loving the way the rough texture felt against my skin. Moving slowly down his neck, I smiled as he moaned, feeling the vibration against my lips. Following the path downward, I continued to kiss and taste his skin.

With a tug of my hair, he brought my mouth back to his and kissed me deeply as my fingers traced his shoulders and chest, down his abs to wrap around his hardened cock. He pushed into my hands as I held him, the sounds he made spurring me on.

“I love the way you feel in my hands,” I sighed against his lips, continuing to run my fingertips up and down his length. The air left his lungs and he rested his forehead against my shoulder, his whole body trembling against me. I squeezed him gently and he moaned, lifting his head to capture my mouth, taking my bottom lip between his and sucking lightly.

Gripping his hair, I lowered his ear to my mouth. “I love the way you feel inside of me even more,” I murmured, smiling at the deep groan that filled the room.

“I need you, Chloe. Please don’t make me wait,” he pleaded breathlessly.

“No more waiting.” I barely recognized my voice as I pushed him back to my bed. His hands never left me as he lay down, pulling me on top of him. The

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moment I saw him against my pillows, something snapped. My body shook with the emotion that surged through me, as if the longing of every fantasy I'd had in the last nine months took hold in that single moment. Sitting up and straddling his hips, I lifted my body, positioning him against me before slowly sinking down again. As he physically filled my body, I felt whole for the first time since the day he stepped into my life.

"You were made for me, Chloe." His fingers slid from my nipple, between my breasts and down my abdomen to where I held him firmly inside of me. "Do you feel that?" His fingers slipped along my clit and around the base of him, moving the slick moisture up and down between us. I lifted my body and saw his jaw tighten as he watched himself become exposed before slipping back inside of me. "Oh God, do that again." His breath was ragged and he watched with an awed expression as I moved my body over him again. "Fuck," he moaned, his head falling back against the pillows. "That's the most perfect thing I've ever seen, seeing you take me inside of you like that." I moved again and he moaned loudly. "I don't know how long… *shit*."

"Close your eyes then," I whispered as I leaned over and placed a kiss on his chest. "And I don't think stamina has ever been your problem."

"Oh Shit, Chloe. You can't say things like that to me right now." With his eyes closed tightly, he reached up over his head and gripped the headboard. My breath caught as I watched the way the movement flexed his arms and chest. Closing my eyes, I rocked my hips slowly, and groaned, completely lost in the way our bodies fit together. An idea formed in my head and I arched my leg, lifting it over his chest to settle on the other side, spinning myself around so my back now faced him. I felt him tense beneath me and his hands grip my hips.

"Fuck! What are you-" he trailed off as I began to move myself on him, my head falling forward as the new angle created sensations I'd never felt before.

"You feel so good," I said breathlessly. One of his hands moved to my back, caressing slowly up my spine. His hands worked in unison, one guiding my hips while the other gripped my shoulder, pulling me down onto him more forcefully.

We continued this way and I noticed the sunlight change color, growing more golden as it moved across the wall until finally disappearing all together. His hips began to rise up to meet mine; each movement becoming more frenzied, more unrestrained. I leaned forward, placing my palms on his thighs to support myself as the intensity of our lovemaking threatened to engulf me. The world became muted and all my focus centered on the sensations within my body and the man giving them to me. I listened as his breathing became gasps, his moans

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became pleas, and my name fell from his lips over and over. In a rush of sudden movements, I was on my stomach, his sweaty chest pressed against my back as he once again reclaimed me.

“Oh, fuck, baby, you feel so damn good.” His words were strained, his voice raspy as each thrust was punctuated with a deep groan. I felt his damp forehead press against my shoulder. “God, it’s like I can’t get close enough.”

“I know,” I whispered, knowing exactly what he meant. My need for him was never sated, my longing to be near him never soothed. I wanted to consume him, to be consumed by him. Always.

My eyes closed, my cheek resting against the cool blankets. His hand fisted in my hair, forcing my head back as his mouth found my neck, each labored exhale sending waves of warm breath across my dampened skin. He kissed along my shoulders, his tongue reaching out to taste me, his teeth nipping and dragging along my skin. I arched my back, angling my hips to meet each thrust. My arms reached out, my hands twisting and tangling in the blankets, my body shaking with the need to let go.

Bennett’s hand moved up my arm, his fingers entwining tightly with mine. I shivered as his free hand brushed up and down my side, stopping to grip my hip and control his movements. I felt his lips trace down my neck and across my shoulders. He shuddered above me, his body trembling as if in surrender, and whispered, almost too quietly for me to hear.

“I love you, Chloe.” My body stiffened momentarily as his words reached my ears. “I love you so much.”

He repeated it over and over, soft murmurs against my skin, punctuating each one with a lingering kiss against my back. I pressed my forehead against the bed and closed my eyes tightly as the enormity of what he said hit me.

“I didn’t know,” he whispered. “I didn’t know I could love you so much.”

“Oh God, Bennett.”

I was completely overcome. A visible shudder ran through me as his body continued to rock into mine, his lips ghosting over my skin. I felt his movements become more frantic and as if on cue, my body began to tighten. I gripped his hand tighter and twisted my fingers deeper into the blankets as a wave of pleasure unlike anything I’d ever known overtook me. I said his name over and over again, my face still pressed against the blankets as I continued to push back against him. With one more deep thrust and a loud groan, his body tensed and stilled above mine as he came inside of me. My whispered name fell from his

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lips in an exhausted gasp as he collapsed against my back.

We lay there in silence as our breathing calmed and our heart rates began to slow. Moving off slightly to my side, he brushed the damp hair from my forehead and tilted my chin to look at him, his expression changing from the hunger and urgency of earlier to one mirroring the devotion I'd heard in his voice.

"That isn't how I wanted to say that," he said quietly, a note of apology in his voice. Our gazes held and I nodded, unable to form any words. My breaths were shallow and my heart pounded in my chest so loudly, I was sure he could hear it.

Say it again. Please.

His eyes searched mine as he continued to twine his fingers through my hair. Closing his eyes briefly, he seemed to be reaching inside himself for something. "I do love you, Chloe."

My chin trembled slightly and I had to look away. I was reeling. *He loved me.* Suddenly, I didn't care why he said it or if it could all be taken away tomorrow. Tonight, right now, the man of my dreams loved me.

I moved my eyes back up to his and saw the worry my hesitation had caused him. A smile slowly lifted my lips as I placed my palm against his cheek. He leaned into my touch and my breath caught at how vulnerable he seemed. My body seemed to vibrate with the love I felt for him. I needed him to know I was with him.

"I love you too, Bennett. *So much*." My voice shook as I finally said the words to him. " *So much*." I blinked and tears I didn't know were there fell from my eyes.

He smiled and it took my breath away as his arms encircled me. "I love you," he whispered, kissing my tear streaked face. Placing his hand on the back of my neck, he watched me, his thumb running lightly over the pulse in my throat. His gaze flickered to my mouth and he pulled me to him, brushing his lips softly against mine and pulling away.

"Say it again, Chloe. Tell me you love me."

Rolling him onto his back, I hovered over him slightly, my hair falling in a curtain around us.

"I love you," I said simply, happier than I thought possible at being able to say those three little words aloud.

Lifting his head from the pillow, he smoothed his hand over my hair and

kissed me, smiling against my lips.

“I think I’m going to need to hear you say that every five minutes,” he whispered against me, pulling my body on top of his. Pressing his mouth to mine, I moaned as his tongue slipped between my parted lips and his hand twisted into my hair to cradle the back of my head. I lay down against his chest and closed my eyes, sighing deeply. His arms wrapped tightly around me and I felt his lips press to the top of my head.

“Can I stay?” he asked quietly, his fingers brushing through my hair.

“Yes,” I sighed. “Never leave.”

His heart beat beneath my ear and the steady rhythm of his breathing, coupled with the emotional exhaustion of the day, began to take its toll as my eyelids grew heavy. I moved up his body slightly, nestling my head in the crook of his neck and placing a soft kiss against his skin.

“I know what you mean now,” I whispered against him.

“Hmm? About what, baby?” he muttered sleepily.

I slid my hand down his naked body, placing my palm over his tattoo.

“This,” I murmured as I began to fall asleep in his arms. “Je ne regrette rien.”

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SIXTEEN – OUI

She loved me.

Sighing deeply, I nuzzled against her warm skin, shifting to move closer to the sound of her beating heart.

Every night we spent together, I found myself waking in this same position: lying atop her, my face pressed against her breasts and my arms wrapped tightly around her. I was drawn to Chloe even as we slept, as if my body craved her even when my conscious mind dozed.

In my twenty-eight years, I'd spent the night with various women, often holding them as we slept, but it was never like this. Just as when we were awake, I couldn't get close enough, as if my body believed that holding her so tightly against me would bind her to me forever. I had to admit that image sounded better each time it came to mind.

Sitting up slightly with my weight on my elbow, I watched her. The full moon outside the window lit up her room just enough to see, painting images of rustling trees along the walls and casting her in soft blue glow.

She sighed in her sleep, pursing her lips and frowning slightly as she readjusted her position. Dark hair tangled from my own hands spread across the white pillows, her right hand rested next to her head, the left against her breast. I would never stop being overwhelmed with how beautiful she was.

Absentmindedly, I reached for her left hand, tracing my fingers along the soft skin. I raised it gently and placed a kiss against her palm, admiring her long, delicate fingers adorned with no polish or jewelry. A soft moan escaped her lips as I lightly massaged her palm. I marveled at how small her hand felt in my own and stilled as my eyes focused on her bare ring finger.

A sudden image passed through my mind. I saw myself on one knee, slipping a beautiful ring on this finger, asking her to take me as hers forever and to let me have her in return. The clarity of that picture was so overpowering it nearly took my breath away.

Pressing my forehead against her chest I closed my eyes tightly, willing myself to calm down, to force back the odd mixture of panic and elation that image evoked. I was struck by how different this feeling was now as opposed to the past.

For the first time ever, an unclear future lay before me, and I was terrified.

As if sensing my struggle, Chloe curled her fingers around mine as she slept, calming me without even realizing it. A few deep breaths and thirty-two beats of Chloe's heart later, I felt calm… and also wide awake.

Lifting myself off of her, I rolled onto my back; gazing at the darkened ceiling without really seeing it.

I was lost in thoughts of Chloe, of us, of what I wanted to give her. Within seconds she shifted, curling herself into my side, her head on my shoulder and her leg draped over my hip. I pulled her to me, turning my body towards hers and closing my eyes again, focusing on how perfectly she fit against me. Running my fingers absentmindedly through her hair, I thought back on how close I came to screwing everything up.

Shifting slightly, I reached over the edge of the bed, retrieving my pants to pull the long thin Dior box from the back pocket.

Lying back, I tightened my hold on her again and opened the box, running my finger along the delicate links that made up the simple bracelet with the word "Oui" connecting the two halves. The moonlight shone on the polished surface and although it was plain as far as jewelry went, it represented everything that Chloe was: effortless, elegant and beautiful. The simple word, engraved in simple script in the smooth platinum, represented us: our connection, our passion, and our promise to each other.

Hopefully, she would understand the meaning.

Removing it from the box, I fastened it around Chloe's wrist, fumbling slightly with the tiny clasp in the dark. I worried momentarily that she would object or take issue with my giving her a gift, but the sense of pride I felt at seeing her sleeping next to me in nothing but my bracelet quickly overshadowed my fears.

After the fiasco with Emmett in my apartment yesterday morning, I'd known I needed a way to show her how I felt, something tangible that would remind her of what we meant to each other. I'd spent the remainder of the day in my home office calling up a few old colleagues from LVMH, trying to get my hands on this exact bracelet. It had been no simple feat to receive it on such short notice, just one of the benefits of having money and power.

My stomach twisted remembering her pained and detached expression as she'd left my apartment yesterday, knowing that I'd been the one to cause it.

I'd stood helplessly across from Emmett, knowing she was in the other room

and listening to every word. Even I was surprised at how easily the lies came; now naturally I slipped back into that cold, heartless persona I used to hide behind on a daily basis.

I knew Emmett felt that I was acting suspiciously but I had no idea he'd actually figured it out. I considered briefly the possibility that Rose had said something, but quickly discounted it. She'd given me her word and regardless of our differences, I believed her.

Even as children, Emmett had always been the one who knew me the best, always seeing more than I wanted him to. Yesterday he'd been relentless, convinced that I was behaving inappropriately.

It killed me that he was right.

Suddenly feeling angry and cornered I'd snapped, shouting that she meant nothing to me. The moment the words left my mouth a crushing sense of guilt and dread settled deep within my chest, knowing without even seeing her face that I had hurt her.

Finally convinced, Emmett had turned to leave, stopping as the sound of a cell phone filled the room.

I'd watched as the realization dawned on him that I was not alone. He'd surprised me though, assuming that I had some random woman with me, apologizing repeatedly before finally leaving.

He wasn't the one who needed to apologize.

When I went to her, I knew instantly that the damage had been done. She was distant and removed, and avoided my eyes as she dressed, making up an excuse about needing to see her friend.

I tried to calm her fears, reminding her that I had only said those things because I promised to keep our secret. I had been so ready to fight her on that, to suggest we just tell him. Judging by his reaction, it was a good thing she had stopped me.

She tried to tell me that everything was fine, but by now I knew her too well, and she was unable to dissemble for me anymore. I managed to convince her to spend the night with me again, playing on her weakness to my touch. I'd said a silent prayer when she reluctantly agreed, promising myself I'd make things right.

I would make things right because I needed her, because I loved her.

For the first time in my life, I knew the depth of those words.

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The sound of my empty stomach reminded me that we'd never had dinner. I smiled as it occurred to me that that seemed to happen a lot.

Placing a soft kiss against her breast and one on her lips I climbed out of bed, careful to not wake her.

I almost laughed as I tried to count how many times I'd imagined being in her bedroom. One of my recurring fantasies had been of laying her across her bed and fucking her into oblivion, second only to the one I had of taking her on top of my desk.

Finding my boxer briefs in a chair near the bed, I pulled them on and made my way into the living room, closing the door softly behind me.

The room was larger than I had realized, and the wide windows lining the deep chocolate colored walls prevented me from having to turn on any lights. The floors were the same cherry wood as the bedroom, and also covered by a large area rug. It was obvious that great consideration had been put into each detail of the room; from the black and white portraits that adorned the walls, to the crystal chandelier that hung over two large, comfortable-looking couches arranged in front of the ornate fireplace.

Grabbing an apple from a bowl on the coffee table, I took a moment to admire some of the photos, recognizing Chloe instantly. There were photos of who I assumed were her parents, some of a group of teenagers, and several more recent ones. I paused as I came across one I knew I had seen before.

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The same photo that graced my desk for years in a digital frame was here on her fireplace.

A beautiful young brown-haired girl standing between my parents smiled back at me. I'd known the girl in the photograph was Chloe since we began working together, but seeing it here in her home was surreal.

I'd always known that Chloe spent time with my family, but I'd obviously underestimated their importance in her life. I thought back to seeing her with Carrington. They had seemed so comfortable, as if it was the most natural thing in the world for her to be in Chloe's arms. Seeing them together evoked a strange longing I'd never felt before. For the first time in my life the thought of having children of my own seemed like a possibility, rather than some vague event set in the distant future.

My body tensed and I stood upright as two arms encircled my waist.

"There you are," she whispered quietly, placing a kiss on my back.

“I was hungry,” I murmured, turning in her arms and motioning to my half eaten apple. “I tried not to wake you up.”

“Hmm. Well, my blanket was gone,” she answered, tightening her hold on me and lifting her chin. “I miss you when you’re not there.”

I smiled and leaned over, placing a soft kiss against her lips and loving that she was referring to the way I held her while she slept.

“Let’s see what we can do to make sure you don’t have to miss me,” I whispered against her lips.

She nodded, and I lightly brushed the back of my hand along her cheek.

“Remember the rule about my not being able to leave without kissing you goodbye?”

“Yes,” I said, as I continued to stroke her face.

“I’d like to make the same rule for you,” she spoke softly, an undertone of sadness to her voice. My hand stilled and I looked into her eyes. Did the fact that I had left worry her?

“I promise I will never leave without kissing you goodbye. I’m not going anywhere, baby…and I *did* kiss you. Right here,” I whispered, tracing my thumb across her bottom lip, placing a soft, lingering kiss there.

“And here.” I pulled away slightly and leaned over, placing an open-mouthed kiss against her covered breast as she moaned. “Have I told you how much I love seeing you in my shirt?”

“You may have mentioned it,” she sighed, as my mouth moved from one breast to the other. Her hands threaded into my hair, holding me to her. My tongue traced her hardened nipple through the thin cotton, and I bit down lightly, feeling myself harden at the sound she made.

“Didn’t you say something about eating?” she asked breathily, her fingers now moving more forcefully against my scalp.

“Oh, I’m getting there.”

I dropped to my knees in front of her, pushing up the bottom of the shirt and wrapping my hands around her hips, pulling her to me. Her stomach muscles tensed under my lips as I kissed a trail down towards her navel.

“But-” she began to protest.

“Shh,” I answered, pushing her back slightly, the sound of the leather cushions creaking as she fell against them. “I can’t wait.”

“Bennett,” she whispered softly, her eyes meeting mine in the dark.

Placing my palms on the inside of her thighs, I pushed them apart, leaving her open and exposed to me. My eyes traveled down her body, illuminated perfectly in a narrow stream of moonlight. Sliding my hands to her hips, I pulled her to the edge of the couch, causing her to gasp quietly. Not wasting any time, I lifted her legs and placed them over my shoulders, turning my head to kiss along her thigh.

“Tell me, Chloe,” I murmured against her skin. She moaned loudly and tugged on my hair, urging me forward.

“I love you,” she whispered. Hearing those words again broke through my last wall of restraint.

The moment my lips touched her I was unable to stop the groan that emanated from deep inside my chest. I brushed my lips from side to side along the delicate, bare skin, closing my eyes against the sensory overload. Everything about her overwhelmed me: her sounds, her smell and especially the way she tasted. Inhaling deeply, I groaned again, literally able to taste her seconds before my tongue made contact.

Her body seemed to vibrate beneath me and I tightened my hold on her hips.

“Easy, baby. Be patient,” I whispered, my lips hovering just above her. “You already know how good I can make you feel.” I lifted my eyes to hers. “Don’t you?”

I could see the dark shape of her hardened nipples straining against the damp, thin material of my shirt, her breasts rising and falling rapidly with her quickened breath. The sight of her so aroused and physically affected by the mere anticipation of my touch sent a surge of arousal to my already painfully hard cock.

“Don’t you, Chloe?” The warm breath from my words fanned over her slick skin, causing her hips to lift off the leather cushion. Increasing my grip, I held her more firmly, thrilled when a whispered ‘yes’ left her lips, the sound more a plea than an answer.

Ever so gently, I traced the tip of my tongue against her, slowly circling, but not touching her clit.

She whimpered softly but with a smile on her parted lips as I tasted her in long strokes, finally giving her what she wanted.

“Yes. Oh God, Bennett, Yes.”

The sound of her voice, so unrestrained and raw urged me on and I hummed

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in pleasure against her.

“Oh fuck, Bennett!”

God, if she kept this up I was going to come just from listening to her.

“I want you inside of me,” she pleaded, her fingers brushing along my face.

“You mean like this?” Removing a hand from her hip, I held her open and slipped my tongue inside, moaning at the faint taste of our lovemaking.

“Fuck, baby,” I began, pulling away to replace my tongue with my fingers. “I can taste us both. Do you have any idea how fucking hot that is?”

I became insatiable, licking, sucking and tasting, letting her sounds and the unrestrained movement of her body as she sought release, overwhelm me. Lifting my eyes, I waited, wanting to see the exact moment her orgasm took hold of her.

She was so beautiful. Eyes closed, mouth open, completely lost to everything in the world for that one moment but the pleasure I was giving her. I wanted so badly to thrust myself inside of her, to relieve the almost painful need I felt, but wanted this to be for her. One small, insignificant thank you for all that she had brought into my life.

Taking her clit into my mouth, I sucked lightly, watching in awe as her body arched and tightened around my fingers. Her hands pulled my hair roughly and she called out my name as she came.

Placing a kiss on each of her trembling thighs, I set her feet on the floor, kissing my way up her body.

“You’re so fucking beautiful when you come,” I whispered against the soft skin below her ear.

Gripping my hair she pulled me to her, kissing me deeply and moaning into my mouth as she tasted herself. Her hands moved down my chest and stomach and I shuddered as her fingers grazed my cock. Gathering her hands in mine, I shook my head.

“No, baby.”

“But-“

“No, no buts. This is all about you,” I whispered against her lips. “I’m usually like this when I’m with you anyway.” We laughed and I moved my hand to run through her tangled hair. “Just let me give this to you.”

She looked thoughtful for a moment, before cupping my jaw and kissing me

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softly.

“Speaking of giving me something,” she began, motioning to the jewelry that now wrapped around her wrist. “Care to tell me where this came from?”

Taking her wrist, I placed a kiss against the delicate chain and gazed into her eyes. “I wanted to give you something,” I started, suddenly unsure of myself. “Something that would remind you…of what…” I trailed off, not sure of how to phrase it.

“I understand,” she whispered. “And it’s beautiful. I’ll never take it off.”

Words couldn’t express how much I loved this woman. Twisting my hands into her hair I pulled her to me, trying to convey everything I felt as I kissed her passionately.

As I pulled away, my breath labored, I rested my forehead against hers.

“I love you, Chloe. Always remember that.” She nodded, her chest heaving with the same excitement I felt.

“I love you, too. Will you let me feed you now?” She giggled at my raised eyebrow. ” *Food*,” she emphasized.

“Please,” I laughed, kissing her forehead before offering her a hand and pulling her to her feet.

“There’s the kitchen,” she motioned. “I’m just going to get cleaned up and I’ll be right out.”

I watched her walk towards the bedroom, admiring the way her long legs were displayed in my shirt, and couldn’t help but smile. Being with her was so effortless, so different than any relationship I’d ever had in the past. She understood me, often finishing my sentences before I’d even completed the thought in my own head. The same vision I’d had as I’d watched her sleep returned to me and I wondered what it would be like to spend every day this way.

Shaking my head, I realized that I was getting ahead of myself; we still needed to tell everyone. My stomach twisted and I quickly swept the thought away. I would just focus on now. We were here together, and I was fucking happy. For once I would stop being so obsessive and just enjoy it.

Entering her kitchen, I turned on a small lamp sitting on a desk near the door and looked around. The space was large and obviously designed by someone who spent a lot of time in here. Like the other rooms it was light and airy, filled with things that were both practical and loved. Huge expanses of light maple

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cabinetry covered the walls with a matching butcher block in the center of the tiled floor.

It was beautiful and elegant, and I imagined the look on my mom's face if she ever saw it. Another pang of guilt flashed through me as I let myself wonder for the first time what she would think if she knew about us.

I heard water running down the hall and moved to the stainless steel refrigerator, opening it to examine the contents. At the sound of her footsteps I pulled out a frozen pizza and looked up to see Chloe walking in wearing a pair of ivory boy shorts edged in lace and a matching camisole. Apparently the look on my face betrayed my thoughts because she laughed. I fucking loved hearing that sound.

"I figured if you got to run around in your underwear," she said motioning to my black boxer briefs.

"Then so did I."

"I think we should make that a new rule," I answered mischievously, my eyes traveling up and down her body. "I love you in my clothes, but you won't find me complaining about this."

"Deal," she answered quietly, rising on her toes and kissing me, smirking playfully against my lips. "I'll add it to the list. And we're not eating this." She took the pizza from my hands and returned it to the freezer, pulling items out and placing them on the counter. "If you want pizza, we'll make one." She stopped and looked at the clock. "Unless you're tired, that is."

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I followed her gaze to the iron clock on the wall that read 1:15a.m.

"I'm anything but tired," I said quickly, my heart skipping slightly at the bright smile that lit up her face. "Tell me where you want me."

She cocked an eyebrow as her gaze wandered hungrily down my body and I shook my head, smirking.

She turned on the large oven and retrieved a pizza stone from a cabinet, placing it inside to preheat.

"We'll just use a prepared crust I have. Do you want to chop or grate?"

For the next twenty minutes we worked together and, just like at work, it was effortless. We talked and laughed; I stole kisses and caught her staring at my chest on more than one occasion. I cleaned up while she gathered plates and silverware, placing them on a tray. The timer went off just as we finished and I followed her with our meal and a bottle of wine into the living room to eat.

An hour later, with full stomachs and an almost empty bottle of red wine, we sat on together on the floor. Chloe leaned against the couch and I lay with my head in her lap, my eyes closed as she ran her hands through my hair.

“So what did you want to be when you grew up?” she asked, continuing the game of twenty questions we’d been having. The answer was easy.

“My dad.”

“Really? That’s it? I mean, there’s nothing wrong with that. He’s an amazing man and I love him as much as my own father, but most little boys want to be a fireman or super hero or something.”

“No,” I said wistfully. “He’s always been the type of man I wanted to be. Besides loving him for the obvious reasons, I respect him more than anyone. I watched him build our family’s company from the ground up. Nobody has more integrity than him… he’s everything I wish I was.” My voice trailed off, the sound of my own words almost mocking me.

Chloe was silent for a moment.

“I think you underestimate yourself. Your father beams with pride when he talks about you. The day he offered me my promotion, he told me how proud he was of you. How hard it was to watch you leave but knowing that you were different from your brother and felt the need to make it on your own. I wish you could have seen the look on his face when he announced you were coming home.”

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“Really?” I turned to her in shock. My father asked me several times throughout the years to return to Chicago, but I’d always refused, not wanting to coast on the Ryan name. The day things ended with Rachel, I’d known it was time to go. The impending retirement of the current CFO presented an opportunity that seemed almost fated. Within twenty four hours I’d given notice to LVMH, and began making plans to leave Paris. I’d never dreamed it meant so much to my father to have me back.

“Really,” she assured me, leaning over and kissing me softly. She continued to play with my hair as I thought about what she said. Minutes passed before the sound of her voice broke through my thoughts.

“I love your hair,” she sighed, more to herself than me.

“I need to get it cut,” I answered, my hands instinctively running through it.

“No, not yet. You usually let it get a bit longer,” she replied absentmindedly, twisting the strands around her fingers.

“I do?”

“Mmhmm,” she nodded.

“You notice that?”

“Of course. Your hair was one of the first things I noticed about you… even before we met.

I sat up and turned to face her, pulling her between my open legs so our faces were only a foot apart.

“What do you mean before we met?”

She looked slightly embarrassed and I tilted her chin up, forcing her eyes to mine.

“Well, I spent a lot of time at your parent’s house and your mom has a lot of photographs of you around. I remember asking about you, thinking how beautiful you were.”

” *You did*?” I asked dumbfounded. I continued to watch her, trying to wrap my mind around the fact that she thought about me even before we met.

“You’re insanely beautiful, Bennett. You know this,” she said with a smile. “In fact…never mind,” she added, shaking her head.

“What?”

“No. It’s nothing. Just something silly.” She averted her eyes, suddenly interested in a non-existent thread on the edge of her top.

What the? And then it occurred to me.

“Is this about my nickname?”

Her eyes widened, and shot up to mine.

Bingo.

“How did you know?” She breathed, horrified. I had to laugh at the mortified expression on her face.

“It was Angela, wasn’t it? God, I knew she couldn’t keep a secret if you smiled at her.”

She let her head fall back against the couch and covered her face with her hands.

“Chloe,” I started, failing at my attempt to keep the laughter from my tone. “Chloe, look at me. It wasn’t Angela who told me. Come on, sit up.”

Reluctantly she let me pull her upright, her face red with embarrassment.

“First of all, it wasn’t Angela, it was actually my family. And second, there’s nothing to be embarrassed about. I *was* a bastard. A cold, arrogant bastard who made your life miserable and I’m more sorry than you know.” With this she looked at me from the corner of her eye, the color fading from her cheeks a bit.

“Actually, when they told me, my first reaction was to be flattered. *You*, the most sexy, intimidating woman I’d ever met, thought *I* was beautiful. You have no idea what that did to me.” One corner of my mouth turned up as she looked at me fully for the first time. I brushed my fingertips along the insides of her arms and scooted a bit closer to her.

“Really? You weren’t furious?” she asked skeptically.

“No, baby. I’ll admit I got a little pissed when I found out that even my mom knew. But I can’t tell you how many nights I laid in bed, jerking off thinking about you calling me that.” She smiled and I continued. “And I have a confession of my own, I saw your picture before too.”

“When?”

“In a group of pictures my mom sent me one year.” I motioned to her fireplace. “You actually have the same photo over there, with my parents. I was so intrigued by you,” I whispered, my hand moving up her arm and shoulder to her hair. ”You were so gorgeous…and yet there was something more, something deeper I couldn’t even name. The first time I saw you, you took my breath away.”

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Our faces drifted closer, our mouths only a breath apart.

“Sometimes I wonder,” I murmured, brushing my lips lightly against hers. “How long I’ve actually loved you.”

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The next morning I woke in her arms, exhausted, sore, and happier than I’d ever been in my life. I looked at the clock on the bedside table and down at Chloe, who was still fast asleep. We’d been up until four in the morning; maybe stamina really *wasn’t* a problem. I brushed the hair from her face and leaned over, placing a line of kisses along her neck to her ear.

“Chloe, I have to go,” I whispered softly.

She moaned sleepily and turned into me. “No, don’t go. Stay and sleep.”

“Baby, I have to. I don’t have any clothes here and I have a meeting downtown in three hours.”

“Shit,” she grumbled. “So do I. What time is it? I feel like I just went to
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sleep.”

“That’s because you did,” I chuckled against her collarbone. “It’s seven.”

“You know, I used to be much more regimented, going to the gym every morning before work. You have seriously cut into my workout routine,” she teased.

“Oh, I think you’ve been getting plenty of exercise,” I growled. She moaned loudly as I worked my way down between her breasts.

“Didn’t you say something about a meeting?” she questioned, even as her hands began tugging me closer.

Groaning in frustration, I placed one last kiss against her breast and cursed my ever present hard on.

“Yes,” I sighed exacerbated.

Rolling onto her side, she propped herself up on her elbow as I climbed out of bed. I searched the floor for my underwear but couldn’t seem to find them.

“Looking for these?” I turned to see her long leg in the air, the sheet hitched up around her hip and the black fabric hung from her foot. *God I loved this woman.* Well two could play at this game.

“No,” I said nonchalantly, picking up my pants from the floor and pulling them on. “I’ll let you keep those this time.” The look on her face was priceless as I grinned at her from over my shoulder. I finished dressing quickly and sat on the edge of the bed to put on my shoes.

I heard a rustle of fabric and felt her arms wrap around my shoulders. The heat of her body pressed against my back radiated through the thin cotton. Turning my head, I kissed her, my hands moving behind me and finding only warm, bare skin.

“Mmm, Chloe. You don’t fight fair.”

“I believe someone once said, as long as it gets me you, I don’t care.”

Standing up, I turned to face her as she knelt on the bed, her naked body now pressed against my clothed one.

“You have me, don’t ever doubt that”, I said, my thumb purposefully tracing over her bracelet.

“I don’t,” she whispered, as she finished buttoning my shirt. “I’ll see you in a few hours.”

“A few hours,” I smiled, reassured by the words. “I love you.”

I kissed her long and slow before reluctantly dragging myself away.

One hundred and sixty three minutes later, I sat across from my father, brother and one other executive in the back of a company limo, only half listening as they discussed the status of his current replacement. Apparently my lack of focus had caused me to miss the hiring announcement of a new executive. With a resigned sigh, I promised myself not to make that mistake again.

That promise was shot to hell the minute a pair of long legs and gold strap heels appeared in the open car door. *Was she.. ?* My cock began to harden at the mere thought that she could be wearing that dress again. I heard her voice just outside the car and I had to physically restrain myself from getting out to see her.

Angela entered first moving past me to take a seat next to Emmett. Despite my distraction I did my best to greet her, only taking my eyes away from the door for the briefest of moments. I could hear Chloe speaking, attempting to say her goodbyes to the young driver now. What was his name? Jared?

Jeffrey? Whatever it was, I didn't like the way he was always looking at her. I was about to step out and throw her over my shoulder, when my brother spoke.

"Boy, that kid sure has a thing for Chloe," he said in a hushed tone, his body leaning towards me.

"Yes," I mumbled, attempting to look uninterested. "I can see that."

Moments later, she appeared in the doorway and I was unable to tear my eyes away. She slipped into the seat next to me, and my heart and dick surged at the sight of her in that white dress again. The door closed behind her and I continued to look down at my paperwork, trying to ignore the way her scent engulfed and obliterated me.

"Gentlemen," she said quietly, nodding to each of the other men in the car.

"Chloe, how have you been?" my father asked amiably. It was clear from his tone how happy he was to see her.

"I've been great, Carlisle. How are you?"

I continued to watch her out of the corner of my eye as she spoke to everyone, noticing the way she crossed her legs, the way her eyes engaged with whomever she was speaking, and how her fingers absentmindedly traced the bracelet that now adorned her wrist.

My bracelet.

We arrived a short time later and I motioned for her to stay behind, explaining to the others that we would be right behind them. The moment the door closed, I

pulled her to me, my hand gripping her hair, my lips hungrily seeking out hers. She gasped as I pulled her roughly to me, the sound quickly turning into a moan as her body melted against mine.

“Do you know how badly I’ve wanted to do that?” I said against her neck. “That dress… I don’t think I can make it through the day with you in that fucking dress.”

“This dress?” she asked confused. “Bennett, this is one of the most modest dresses I own.”

“God, I know, it makes no fucking sense. There’s just something about it…the color and the way it looks on you…wondering what you have on underneath.” My hands began moving up her thighs, bunching the fabric in my fingers as I went.

“Okay, listen,” she said, stopping my hands from further exploration. “If you can make it through the day,” she paused and lifted an eyebrow. “I’ll let you take it off me tonight.”

” *Shit Shit,* ” I groaned. My head fell back against the seat as I ran my hands through my hair. “I am so fucked.”

Turning at the sound of her laughter, I looked at her through narrowed eyes. “This isn’t funny.”

She tried unsuccessfully to hide her smile. “Come on, we can do this.”

“That’s easy for you to say. You won’t be the one walking around with a massive hard-on all day.” At this point she wasn’t even attempting to hide her laughter. I tried to glare at her but it was impossible. With a resigned sigh I cupped her face. “One more kiss?”

She leaned in and pressed her lips to mine softly before motioning towards the door.

Nodding, I grabbed my laptop and briefcase and exited before her, holding the door and assisting her as she stepped out into the bright morning sunshine. The light played in the colors of her dark hair, worn long and hanging in thick waves down the center of her back. My hand itched to touch her as we entered the building, to entwine my fingers with hers or place my palm on the center of her back.

Just one more bit of restraint I would have to muster.

The conference room was on the main floor and we entered only a few minutes after the others who were still greeting each other. I watched as my

father smiled at Chloe, walking ahead of me and pulling out her chair. My stomach twisted with a mixture of guilt and jealousy at not being able to do it myself.

“Ms. Mills, do you have the PEG reports?” I asked quietly, taking the seat next to her. She’d begun sorting through files, immediately moving to the bottom of the stack and placing the correct one in my hand.

“Yes, Mr. Ryan.” Our eyes met only briefly but her fingers lingered against mine for a moment longer than was appropriate, the pad of her index finger brushing along the back of my hand. The simple yet intimate contact caused my pulse to increase slightly.

“Thank you,” I murmured, her eyes meeting mine again. I could already see this was going to be an interesting meeting.

The next hour ran like clockwork. Chloe sat mere inches from me, taking notes and handing me information at the appropriate time, but I was constantly aware of each of her movements. I hadn’t realized how hard it would be to keep the distance once I accepted my feelings. I knew on a cerebral level it was best to keep it between us for now, but I was already feeling the strain emotionally.

I was proud to be in love with Chloe, and even more proud that she loved me in return. I didn’t want to hide that. Despite our agreement, I could already see that we would need to make some changes soon.

I stood to give my own part of the presentation, discussing projected earnings and profit margins, conscious all the while that she was watching me. Even from across a darkened room, ostensibly focused on a PowerPoint presentation, I felt this unrelenting draw to her. It was unlike anything I’d ever known before.

As I returned to my seat to listen, my part done for now, my eyes drifted to her crossed legs. The tiniest hint of lace peaked out from under the hem of her dress; a sshit so thin and insignificant that no one else would even notice it. But I did. My fingers itched to touch it, to reach out to her creamy thigh and either cover it up or expose more; I hadn’t decided which yet.

A few more minutes passed, and with each one, my attention grew more focused on the small strip of ivory lace. Looking around and satisfied that no one was paying attention, I slipped my hand under the table and straightened her skirt, removing the temptation from my sight.

“I’m not sure if that was for you or me,” I whispered.

She bit her lip and smiled softly at me, as our eyes met in the dark. My hand had yet to leave her thigh, and I could literally feel the current passing between

us. Conscious of others in the room, I gave her leg a light squeeze before removing my hand from her warm skin, my fingers tingling with the loss of contact.

I watched as she cleared her throat quietly and returned her attention to the papers in front of her. A small, slightly embarrassed smile pulled at the corner of her lips and I was thrilled to see that she was every bit as affected by me as I was by her.

At ten after twelve, with preliminary contracts in hand, we headed back to the office. Conversation was lively as Emmett told everyone the story of trying to teach Carrington how to catch a football over the weekend. Normally he would have had my undivided attention, but I busied myself on my Blackberry.

With one email I ordered Chloe a huge flower arrangement of pink orchids to be delivered tonight. I now knew they would look perfect on the table in her bedroom. I was unable to keep from smiling as I composed the message I wanted on the card. I glanced at her, now sitting across from me, seemingly lost in her calendar. She certainly appeared better at focusing and tuning out distractions than I was.

From under my lashes I watched as she tapped the pencil against her full lower lip before taking it gently between her teeth. I groaned inwardly and looked back at my phone, typing her out a message.

6 hours until that dress comes off.

The phone buzzed quietly in her hand and she pushed a series of buttons. I watched the expression change on her face the moment she realized it was from me. Raising one eyebrow she looked up at me before typing and returning to her calendar.

Actually, 5 hours 37 minutes. Trust me, I'm counting.

Fuck. She was good.

What are you wearing under that dress?

Once again, she was so nonchalant as she glanced at her phone and typed her response, I wouldn't have even known what was going on if I hadn't been in on it. She seemed to take longer to respond than she had before, but it was explained as soon as my phone buzzed. Instead of a message there was a simple link. http://www.laperlausa.com/USA/servlet/SetIDWebObject?ID=10613&IDType=prd

Sweet Shit. The link took me straight to the La Perla website and a photo of

the exact panties she was wearing right now. Shit, that tiny sshit of satin and lace would be so easy to ri–

"Bennett? Are you okay" My father's voice broke through my thoughts and I lifted my chin to look at him. Five sets of concerned eyes looked back at me, including Chloe's.

What an actress.

"Of course," I answered, waving him off. "Just catching up on some emails." Appeased, he nodded and went back to his conversation. I didn't miss her smirk before returning to her work.

Will you come to lunch with me?

I waited, trying to watch her unnoticed.

I'd love to.

When we pulled into the parking garage and unloaded, I promised my brother I would see him later that afternoon for a meeting before we all separated.

"Hungry?" I asked, motioning towards my car.

"Starving," she grinned.

I opened the door for her, watching as she folded herself into the seat, silently promising that I would behave. We left for meetings and lunches all the time together, so I wasn't particularly worried about appearances.

There wasn't a dull moment in the conversation as we drove to a small Italian restaurant on the outskirts of the city. I held her hand the entire time, relishing in the simple act of just being able to touch her, and soothed by her thumb rubbing random, lazy circles on my hand.

As we parked, I shut off the engine and turned to her.

"Thank you for coming."

She smiled brightly, and I was consumed with how much I adored this woman.

"I'm glad to get you all to myself for a bit."

We sat in the car, under the shade of a large oak. The signs of summer were all around us – bright grass, vivid flowers, crowds enjoying the sun – but all I saw was her. Her eyes drifted quickly to my mouth as I smoothed a wayward curl, her breath hitching as my fingers traveled down the silky strand that brushed the top of her right breast.

"I can't believe how much I want you right now," I said, my voice raspy and

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strained. “Does this ever stop?” Sliding my hand through her hair, I gripped the back of her neck, pulling her towards me as my thumb brushed the soft skin along her throat.

“I hope not.” Her whisper was spoken against my parted lips, and I closed my eyes as I tasted her warm breath on my tongue. Closing the distance, she pressed her mouth softly to mine, delicately taking my bottom lip between hers. I moaned as the simple, chaste kiss sent a surge of need throughout my body and I felt myself harden, cursing the fact that my car didn’t have a back seat.

Pulling away, I pressed my forehead against hers, the feel of her rapid pulse racing beneath my thumb.

“As much as I’d like to sit here and kiss you all day, if we want to eat before my next meeting we need to get out of this car,” I murmured.

She laughed and I kissed her hair, smiling at the familiar scent of oranges.

“Stay there,” I instructed, sliding out of my seat and walking around to open her door. I helped her out, once again admiring the way that shit dress hugged her body, and placed a possessive hand on her lower back as we continued into the restaurant.

I requested a small, semi-secluded table near the back of the dining room and pulled out her chair as she sat.

“I’ve never been here,” she mused as she read the menu.

“I love it. I come here when I need to get away from the people in the city,” I added, not even needing to look at my own menu. “They have the best Ossobuco I’ve had outside of Italy.”

She shook her head, smiling. “I’ve never had that.”

“Good, then you can try mine.” I helped her decide what to order and we continued our conversation from the drive over.

“Okay,” she began, eyeing me appreciatively as I took off my suit jacket and hung it on the back of my chair. “Favorite family vacation?”

I reached across the table and laced our fingers. “Hmm…That’s a tough one. We got the chance to travel a lot growing up, but I think my favorite memories are of the time we spent at our summer house on the coast. Playing in the sand, learning to swim in the ocean, just being a kid. What about you?”

She sighed. “I haven’t been to the ocean in so long, I bet you were adorable.”

“Well, you’d have to ask my mother,” I laughed, rolling my eyes. “And I’m sure she’d love to talk about it. Now answer my question.”

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“I used to go to Chicago every summer to stay with my mom. I suppose that’s why I stayed after she died, to feel like I was still close to her.” I squeezed her hand.

“You have no idea how thankful I am that you did,” I replied softly.

Our food arrived and I continued on with the questions as we ate.

“First time?” I was greeted with raised eyebrows from across the table.

“First time what?” she asked her eyes narrowing. I leaned forward with my elbows on the table, dying of curiosity.

” *First*, first time,” I stated, emphasizing each word.

“Really?”

“Really.”

She cleared her throat and took a long drink of her water.

“I was seventeen and he was eighteen, we dated throughout most of my senior year.” I was already feeling my blood pressure increase imagining some sleazy teenage boy touching the beautiful young girl I had seen in the photographs at her house.

“Actually you’ve met him,” she mentioned with a casual wave of her hand.

“Excuse me?” I asked, staring at her dumbfounded.

“Yeah,” she nodded, twirling her pasta around her fork. “David, the guy we ran into before Seattle.”

Oh. *David.*

My hand went automatically to the bridge of my nose as I remembered the day we ran into her ex-boyfriend. The same David who put his arms around her and made her laugh. The same David she was thrilled to see, who was obviously still in love with her and who now lived in Chicago. *That* David.

“So David was your first.” My voice was flat, and somehow it didn’t quite come out as the question I’d intended. I had genuinely wanted to know about her first time but I simply didn’t realize it would be so…real. “And?”

“And what?”

“Tell me,” I said, trying to mask the hard jealousy raging through me.

“Well, it was in a corn field. I still remember the sound of the corn blowing in the wind.”

“A *corn field*? That sounds like the beginning of a horror movie,” I mumbled.

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What kind of douche takes a girl to a corn field to have sex for the first time?

"True, it does sound odd to hear it now," she replied laughing. "But it was sweet, and he was gentle.

All in all, not a bad way to lose one's virginity."

I paused as I considered my next question. *Did I want to know?*

"Did you love him?"

I lifted my eyes to hers, terrified of what I would find there. Terrified that this all consuming love I felt for her and only her, she had shared with someone else.

"I thought I did… but those feelings all feel very young and naive in hindsight. I don't think I truly understood what that word meant until I met you." She tightened her grasp on my hand as she spoke, attempting to soothe me. I obviously knew she'd been with other men before me, but knowing and actually hearing the details were two different matters. I could literally feel my Caveman tendencies bubbling beneath the surface.

"What about you?"

"What?" I asked, distracted. I'd been mentally calculating how long it would take to find David's office and strangle him.

"Your first time?" She reminded me gently.

"Oh, it was nothing as exciting as a corn field, I can tell you that much." I hated the snark in my voice but couldn't squelch it.

She narrowed her eyes again and glared at me.

"Okay, okay. I was sixteen and a sophomore. We'd been at a football game that night and a bunch of us went over to my friend's house to spend the night. Well he had this sister who was a senior and…well you know." I shrugged my shoulders. "So were you with him more than once?"

"Wait, wait, wait," she interrupted. "You were sixteen and she was what? Eighteen?"

"I guess? But you didn't answer my question."

"And you're not answering mine."

"There's not really much to tell. It took like two minutes. I was practically ready to come before she agreed. I'm glad you find this so amusing," I retorted sarcastically, glaring at her as she doubled over in laughter. "Now answer my fucking question."

"Oh God," she was barely able to get out. Sitting up, she wiped the tears from

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her eyes. “That is…just knowing the way you are now…God. That poor girl, if she only knew what she missed out on.”

I fucking love this woman.

“And yes, I had sex with him more than once,” she answered and my jaw clenched in response.

“How many is more than once?”

“Really, Bennett? How many women have you had sex with?”

“Well…”

“Did you love any of them?” The forwardness of her question surprised me.

“I love *you*,” I stated, hoping that would appease her.

“I love you, too. But that’s not what I asked.”

My stomach twisted with guilt as it always did when I thought of her.

“Yes.” I kept my voice even, hoping that none of the pain I felt was clear.

“Who?” I could see the same battle raging in her eyes as I’d felt a moment ago: *Did she really want to know this?*

“Her name was Rachel. I knew her when I lived in Paris.”

“What happened?”

“It ended.”

“Why?” She sipped her water, attempting casual.

“It just…did,” I said with finality. “Why did it end with David?”

She looked surprised to suddenly be the focus again.

“Um…David was great, he *is* great, but I was going off to college and I didn’t want the long distance thing.”

I felt my jaw flex, hard. “So it wasn’t that things weren’t working, or you’d lost interest?”

“No. I just figured, if it was meant to be, it would happen. We’d end up together somehow. That’s why I was so surprised to see him that day.”

My fist clenched under the table. Is that what she had been thinking? That he popped back into her life because of some “destined to be together” bullshit?

Abruptly tossing my napkin on the table, I glared at her.

“Are you finished?” My voice sounded a bit harsher than necessary.

“What?” she questioned, confusion clear in her expression. Closing my eyes, I

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exhaled deeply.

“I said. Are. You. Finished?”

Rolling her eyes, she set her glass on the table and stood. “Okaaay.” Grabbing her purse, I gripped her elbow and led us out of the restaurant.

“What the hell is your problem?” she demanded, yanking her elbow from me as the confusion on her face was quickly replaced by irritation.

I avoided her question and her eyes as we walked to the car, her steps quickening to open her door before I could get to it.

Climbing in, I started the engine and peeled out of the parking lot, gripping the steering wheel so tightly my knuckles were white. Of course she’d thought that. How had I gotten myself in this fucking mess? I’d been lucky so far with Mike, and apparently with David, but someday, someone was going to walk in and claim her.

Claim her in a way that I couldn’t as long as we were hiding.

My blood boiled as I thought about all the things I wanted to do with her but couldn’t, all because of the situation we’d put ourselves in.

“Are you going to tell me what the fuck is going on?” she demanded from the passenger seat.

“Is that what you thought that day you saw him? That your Prince Charming had ridden back into your life to save you from your asshole of a boss?”

Her eyes widened in disbelief.

The shrill sound of my cell phone cut through the silence as she opened her mouth to speak.

“Fuck!” I shouted, retrieving it from my pocket. Taking a deep breath I answered, my tone leaving no doubt as to my current frame of mind.

The confused voice of a prospective client was on the other end. I did my best to calm down and smooth over whatever damage I had done by the time we pulled into the parking garage. Chloe didn’t even wait until I’d completely stopped before she had the door open, slamming it roughly as she stormed off. Could this day get any fucking worse?

“Chloe!” I shouted to her retreating form. She didn’t look back and disappeared into the lobby.

Quickly ending my phone call, I raced towards our office, knowing that’s where she’d be. Sure enough, I heard drawers and files being slammed as soon

as I stepped off the elevator.

“You. My office, now.” I said as I brushed past her.

“Are you out of your shited mind?” she yelled behind me. I turned to face her after closing the door and stumbled back, her palms colliding with my chest. “You do not get to speak to me like that anymore.”

“Let’s get this straight, Chloe,” I stated, stalking towards her. She took three steps backward, a small gasp leaving her throat as her body came in contact with the plate glass window next to my desk. I placed a hand on either side of her head, trapping her.

” *You*,” I whispered roughly, my mouth hovering near hers, “are *mine*. Nobody, not Mike, not David, nobody is going to take you from me. It’s *my* name you scream at night. It’s *me* that makes you come harder than ever before. It’s *my* cock you beg for. It’s *me* you love, Chloe. *Me*.”

Her eyes fell closed and she shuddered as my hand moved to cup her cheek, her chest rising and falling with her quickened breaths.

“Look at me,” I growled, my hand trembling against her cheek. “I love you beyond all reason, Chloe.

Nobody is going to take you away from me.”

With a shaky breath, she opened her eyes and slid her hands to my hips. Our eyes locked, our breath intermingling as she strengthened her grip and tugged slightly, pulling me closer. This moment was so close to where it all began and yet so different. Two stubborn people filled with needless rage and insatiable lust, standing on the edge of a precipice, knowing the next step would change everything.

The difference however, loomed larger than any emotion preceding it. This time my lust was not driven by my all-consuming need for control, but for the consuming love I felt in every breath and every heartbeat.

Would my life ever be complete while keeping my love for her a secret?

The answer was no.

My next step was decided, I would make this right.

But first….

I drove my hand into her hair and gripped it tightly, closing any distance between us. My pulse roared in my ears as I tasted her, a soft moan escaping as my tongue slid against hers, the sound going straight to my cock. Her fingers threaded tightly into my hair, leading me where she wanted.

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Sliding my hands down her curves, I was met with warm skin as I caressed the back of her thigh. In one fluid movement, I hitched her leg onto my hip, pressing her further against the cool glass.

Her nails ran lightly along my skin as she pushed my jacket roughly off my shoulders, letting it fall in a pile at my feet.

She gasped as I lifted her slightly, the movement repositioning our bodies, my erection now pressing against her. My lips found her neck, sucking and biting along her throat, not caring if I marked her.

She was mine; her heart, her mind, and her body.

Pulling her away from the outside world, I gathered her closer, my lips never straying as I took the four steps to my desk. Loosening my grip, I sat her on the glossy wood and stepped between her parted legs.

“Nobody could ever take me from you,” she whispered against my open mouth, her hands now frantically pulling my shirt from my pants. “I’ve never loved anyone like this…”

She gasped as I pushed her dress off her shoulder, exposing as much skin as I could; my teeth marring her perfect, creamy flesh.

“Its like I can’t breathe until I’m with you.” Her voice was raw and desperate as she loosened my tie with her hands and her words loosened the knot of jealousy in my chest. “I don’t own my thoughts any more…everything…it all belongs to you.”

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Her fingers fumbled to undo my shirt, before pulling roughly, my chest now exposed to her feverish kisses as the tiny ivory buttons scattered across the floor.

Placing my hands on her hips, I pulled her towards me, groaning as I felt her heat through my pants.

Shaky fingers traveled down my stomach to my belt, the sound of the metal buckle and her frantic breathing echoing around us. Lowering my zipper she pushed my pants down my hips, placing open mouthed kisses along my skin as she went.

“I love you so much, Chloe,” I whispered, guiding her back to lie on the desk.

This was the realization of every fantasy I’d ever had: her dark hair spread across my desk, her beautiful body open and waiting. Lifting her head, she gripped my shirt, pulling me over her.

“These have to go,” I growled, pushing her dress higher up her hips, the tiny sshits of ivory lace finally visible to me.

“Oh, fuck yes,” she begged. “Please.”

The sound of her pleading, so needy and wanting, took my breath away. I wrapped the delicate straps around my fist, using them to pull her roughly against me, the length of my cock sliding against the soaked lace.

“Yes,” she groaned, her hand reaching above her head and sending my keyboard crashing to the floor.

“Fuck, do that again.”

I repeated the action; her body sliding up the smooth wood and back down against me.

“Fuck, Chloe. All those months of wanting to touch you…wishing you would touch me. Maybe when I’m done I’ll bend you over and take you again from behind. I know how much you like that. Don’t you, Chloe?” Tightening my grip, I pulled sharply once more, the sound of her moans and the tearing fabric filling my ears as I tossed the tattered lace to the floor.

“I can’t wait to get you home and rip this dress off of you,” I panted, my hands teasing her cloth covered nipple. “I want you completely naked under me, your hair spread out on my pillows, and your gorgeous tits bouncing while I fuck you.”

I pressed the head of my cock against her and gripped her hips tightly, watching as she took the length of me inside of her body. Closing my eyes I paused, relishing in the feel of being engulfed by her. She lifted her hips, taking me deeper and I groaned, pulling out before pushing into her again.

Placing her legs over my shoulders, I hovered over her, gripping the sides of the desk as I thrust deeply.

Within the blurry recesses of my mind, I was aware that we were in my office, that there were people just on the other side of these walls. There were footsteps in the hall, traffic on the street below and phones ringing in the distance. I knew it should matter, but it didn’t.

“I can’t get close enough,” I panted. “It doesn’t get any easier when I’m with you… or… *fuck*…even inside you.”

Her body slid along the glossy surface with each of my thrusts, her hair tangling behind her, hands grasping to hold on. She arched her back, palms hitting the desk, sending a stack of files to the floor, a flurry of papers scattering around us. The flat monitor shook, threatening to topple, pens rolled across wood, one by one bouncing on the carpet below.

I kissed and bit along her bare legs, feeling her sexy shoes resting next to my head, and tilted my hips to slip deeper. She moaned in time with my movements, clawing at my open shirt, her body rocking up to meet me.

“Touch yourself, baby. Let me see you.” My voice was strained and desperate, trying to hold out, to see her come first. She trailed a hand between us, her fingers brushing my abdomen as she found her clit.

I groaned as I watched her fingers slip between the bare skin to stroke herself, her muscles gripping ever so slightly as she found a rhythm. My arms trembled above her, my chest heaving with the exertion of our lovemaking. I felt my body tense in anticipation, the slow burn I’d been prolonging began to spread, the perfect friction I felt inside of her finally overwhelming me.

“Bennett,” she whispered, her eyes meeting my face, the nails of her free hand digging painfully into my shoulder. The shock of it caused me to cry out, the beautiful sting pulling me back, allowing me to focus on her body.

She was close.

I roughly pulled the front of her dress lower, the seams of the perfect white material giving way slightly with the force. Her right breast free, my hungry eyes feast on it, my hand cupping the exquisite fullness as my fingers teased and pinched her hardened nipple. She swore, arching into me again, her body finally clenching around me.

“Right there, Bennett…right there.”

“Fuck! Like this?”

“Yes…Oh God,” she moaned, her voice no more than a whisper. My release began to surge through me and I was no longer able to hold it off. Gripping the edge almost painfully, I used the force of my entire body as I thrust, my cock pulsing deep inside of her. I placed a hand over her mouth, muffling her cries as she tensed, her body gripping and clenching around me as she came.

With trembling hands, I moved her legs down around my hips and collapsed on top of her, my shaking arms no longer able to support my weight. She pulled me to her breasts, her arms around my neck as her fingers wove into my hair. Her heart raced beneath my ear and I placed a kiss against her dampened skin.

“Come with me to Paris.” The words were out of my mouth before I realized what I’d said; my heart sped up as I waited for her answer.

“What?” Her hands stilled in my hair and she tilted her head to see my face.

Lifting myself on my forearms I looked at her, my fingers sweeping the

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sweaty hair off her forehead.

“Let me take you to Paris. I want to take you to my cafe, hold your hand, and walk along the Seine,” I said excitedly. “Please say yes, Chloe.”

Pushing herself up on her elbows she looked at me with wide eyes, searching my face before smiling.

“Okay,” she laughed. “Let’s go to Paris.”

I gripped her head and pulled her to me, smiling against her lips. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“We can go over Shitmas, when the office is closed for two weeks. That way we’ll still get to see each other every day.”

Her expression faltered slightly, her eyes drifting downwards.

“Chloe?” I asked, lowering my chin to meet her eyes. Before I could ask, the sound of my desk phone broke the silence.

Standing, I pulled up my pants and fastened my belt and helped her up before lifting the receiver.

“Bennett Ryan.”

“Bennett, I need you upstairs immediately.”

“Yes, sir,” I answered, my attention focused on Chloe as she attempted to right her clothing. “I’ll be up in five minutes.” Hanging up the phone, I turned to her.

“I need to run upstairs.” I paused, eyeing her skeptically. “Chloe, are you okay? I didn’t hurt you, did I?”

Shaking her head she walked quickly into my bathroom, returning with one of my shirts I kept there.

“No, of course not. I’m fine. Just a bit…worn out.” She smiled but something about it seemed off.

“You’re sure?” I bent my head to catch her eye.

She nodded.

“Okay, why don’t you go in and get cleaned up, I’ll straighten things in here and run up and see what my dad needs. When I get back we can go home and start planning our trip.” I pulled her to me, running my fingers through her hair, smiling as I attempted to tame it. “Will that work?”

“I’ll be waiting,” she whispered, her cheek resting against my chest.

I kissed her hair and turned her towards the bathroom, watching as she closed

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the door behind her.

Something was off, but for the life of me I couldn't figure it out. I shrugged out of my damaged shirt, slipping into the new one. Picking up the fallen items, I chuckled as I attempted to right the piles of papers that had scattered across the floor.

Apparently declarations of love hadn't helped our control any.

Rounding the desk, I picked up her torn panties, smiling as I opened the drawer and placed them inside with the others. When I came downstairs I would show her, I couldn't wait to see her reaction when she realized they were here all along.

"Chloe? I'll be right back. Okay?" I called through the door.

"Alright," she answered.

With a final chell of my office and a brief glimpse in the large mirror that hung near Chloe's desk, I made my way to the elevator. My mind was buzzing with the idea of taking Chloe to Paris, to show her everything I loved and see it through her eyes. I smiled and shook my head as the gold doors closed, realizing I was humming. I'd made my decision and nothing was going to keep me from following through.

I stepped off the lift and continued down the hall, smiling as my father's assistant waved me back into the rear office. Knocking I stepped into the room and smiled at him.

He did not smile back.

I knew in that moment that reality had finally caught up with us.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

SEVENTEEN - OMISSIONS

Bennett's POV

My father sat at his large desk, his chin resting on his tented fingers, a hardened expression on his face. My eyes scanned the room, stopping at the familiar face of the man in the chair opposite him. My jaw tightened and my stomach clenched as the pieces began to come together. I glared at him, and he smirked back.

"Bennett," he stated, his arms coming to rest on the desk and his gold pen turning idly in his fingers.

"I believe you know Mr. Darby."

I nodded. "Yes, sir."

I thought back to that night at dinner, how glad I'd been to see my old friend.

He took a deep breath. "Bennett, I've called you in here because Mr. Darby has leveled some pretty serious accusations against you. I thought it best to allow you to defend yourself face to face."

A deep weight began to settle in my chest as he continued.

"He claims that during the time you and Ms. Mills were in Seattle together, you behaved inappropriately. To be more specific, he claims to have witnessed the two of you kissing rather heatedly before entering her room together." His voice had a disbelieving, almost mocking quality to it and I felt my shoulders slump slightly. I realized he hadn't brought me here to chastise me, but to defend myself from what he believed were false accusations.

The silence in the room pressed upon me, amplifying my loss for words. My eyes drifted to the floor in defeat.

A throat cleared, but I wasn't sure whose.

My father stood, his glare reproachful as he rounded the desk and made his way to the door.

"I think we're done here, Mr. Darby. Thank you for bringing this to my attention." He paused, the prolonged quiet only increasing my dread. "And I would appreciate your discretion."

"Of course, Carlisle."

The door closed and he exhaled deeply, walking past me to stand in front of

the large expanse of floor to ceiling windows.

I waited.

“How long?” he asked in a voice that was entirely too calm.

I hesitated, still gripping even now to the promise I had made to keep our relationship between us. “A few months.”

He sighed heavily again, his gaze falling to the sidewalks below.

“Bennett.” The sound of my name edged by such disappointment tore at my stomach. “If I would have believed for even a second there was one bit of truth to his story, I would never have discussed this in front of him.”

“I know.”

“So, I’m correct in assuming that this is why you’ve seemed distracted recently.” It was a statement, not a question.

“Yes, sir.” My voice was tentative, almost unrecognizable to my own ears.

The leather chair creaked as he returned to his seat. I raised my chin to see him. His expression was pensive while his tone belied his anger, calm and reproachful.

He did not meet my eyes.

“Bennett, to say that I am disappointed in you does not begin to express my frame of mind right now.

You are my son, but you are also an executive of this company and have therefore been entrusted with the livelihood of others. Your behavior shows a wanton disregard for that.” He paused and I saw a flash of sadness sweep over his features. “I realize that this is…Chloe that we’re talking about, but do you have any idea what the ramifications would have been if she had reported you? This isn’t just about you, Bennett. “

“Yes, sir. I know.” I cleared my throat and met his eyes. “I take complete responsibility for this.”

“This isn’t just about you taking responsibility. If this would have gone badly, your family and the families of your employees would have been jeopardized,” he said, the disapproval evident in his voice. “I expected more from you, son.”

A deep sense of shame crept through me. I had disappointed my father; the one person whose opinion, up until recently, meant more to me than anyone else’s.

“I know,” I answered, my eyes boring into the complex wood grain of his

antique desk. What more was there to say?

“You do realize that if this was anyone else, you two would be fired with no questions asked?”

“Yes, sir. I do.”

He waited and I glanced up at him again, the weight of his thoughts visible in his features. He began shuffling through a stack of papers on his desk as he considered his next words.

“I can’t allow Chloe to continue working for you,” he said solemnly, the finality in his tone leaving no question that this was not up for debate. I froze as the reality became clear that as of this moment, Chloe no longer worked for me.

“As you know, there’s a new executive beginning next month. I worked with him years ago and he’s already been approved by the board. He’ll be in need of an assistant.” He paused, nodding as if he’d come to some decision. “I’ll have all the arrangements made for Chloe to be transferred and hopefully, no one will be the wiser.” Raising his eyes, he continued. ” *If* she plans on staying, that is.”

I swallowed loudly and met his gaze, his last words breaking me from my stupor. He watched me and his eyebrows lifted, as if knowing his words had hit home. I felt something shift inside, the shame of disappointing my father quickly replaced by the fear of how she would react to this.

She would be devastated, of that I was sure. But she wouldn’t leave…would she?

I watched as he picked up his phone. I assumed he was speaking to his assistant, but his hushed words didn’t register.

My body seemed to be made of lead, my feet planted to this spot as my mind raced with the possible outcomes. As much as I hated the truth coming out this way, there was something freeing about others finally knowing.

Beneath the guilt and dread, there was also relief; as if a burden had suddenly been lifted from me.

We could finally move forward; surely she would see this. No more hiding, no more sneaking out of each other’s apartments in the early hours. I could tell everyone I loved her, I could hold her hand, I could ask herA familiar, cheerful voice from the reception area broke into my thoughts. She entered the room, and my body instantly responded to her presence. I felt my breathing even out and my muscles relax slightly; the vice-like grip that had been holding me here finally starting to loosen.

I longed for her, even now. I longed to spare her from this and ease the pain with which she would soon be confronted. My hand twitched at my side, my fingers itching to feel her, to entwine with hers and face this together.

She crossed the room to stand beside me, the sound of her dress swinging around her beautiful legs and her delicate scent reaching me before she did. Her mere presence soothed me, even when she was unaware of it.

Her eyes met mine, her lips turned up into a gorgeous smile I knew was meant for only me. I attempted to reciprocate, managing only a small, apologetic one in return.

Her once beautiful, shiny curls were now loosened, the result of my greedy hands threading into her hair. Her lips were red; her neck covered in small sshites from my face and my teeth. The neckline of her perfect white dress was now misshapen, due to my desperate need to see and touch her. These details were so slight that I was sure only someone who had studied her as much as I had would notice them, but as I met my father's disapproving eyes, I felt certain he did as well.

Her gaze moved between us and the smile fell.

"Mr. Ryan?" she questioned, her eyes now on my father.

I exhaled deeply, readying myself for what was to come.

"Chloe," he began, his tone professional but the undertone of regret apparent. "I'm sure you're aware we have a new executive starting next month."

"Yes, sir," she answered, her confusion evident. She watched as he began to move files into his briefcase, his eyes focused on his task.

"I've decided to transfer you to his office."

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Chloe's POV

My stomach dropped.

"Excuse me?" I asked, turning to look at Bennett, positive I'd heard him wrong. "I don't understand."

The moment I met his expression, I knew. I closed my eyes as I felt my world fall apart around me.

"You'll be on paid administrative leave until then-"

" *Dad*." Bennett's impassioned plea cut him off.

Carlisle glared at him reproachfully before closing his briefcase and
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continuing.

“I’m not discussing this any further. Bennett can answer any questions you have,” he said with an air of finality.

My eyes fell to the floor, the sting of tears threatening to escape.

I wouldn’t do this, not here.

Angry with myself and determined to regain my composure, I hardened my expression; straightening my back and lifting my chin to meet his gaze. I could feel my heart pounding in my ears, my skin felt hot and uncomfortable and my nails dug painfully into my palm, but I wouldn’t break down.

His expression softened slightly, and it only deepened my shame. I couldn’t blame Carlisle for what he was doing; if anything, I deserved much worse. I’d seen other employees fired for infractions far less severe, and I knew that my job and reputation were only being spared because of my relationship with his family.

Knowing that and having disappointed him hurt worse than I could ever have imagined.

“Yes, sir,” I answered, my voice trembling slightly.

I heard Bennett sigh next to me and saw his head drop in my peripheral vision, but I didn’t look away.

Carlisle looked at me for a moment longer and I was instantly reminded of my father and how he would react if he knew how I’d behaved. The tense silence seemed to stretch on until he cleared his throat and stood from his chair.

“I have a meeting I need to get to,” he said, his eyes moving to his son. “I’ll explain your absence and expect to see you at the house tonight.”

Once again, his tone was firm, leaving no room for argument. Bennett muttered something in acknowledgement and Carlisle nodded, retrieving his briefcase from the desk and making his way to the door.

The soft click as it closed echoed in the silent room. I continued to stare unseeingly at the vacant chair, not trusting myself to speak or consider what was really happening.

“Chloe,” he said softly. “I’m so sorry.”

“No,” I started with a slight shake of my head. “Don’t do that. I’m a big girl, Bennett. I knew exactly what I was getting into.”

“But I shouldn’t-“

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“Don’t,” I said, cutting him off, pleading with him not to apologize for what we had. “How..?”

I wasn’t sure I wanted to know how he’d found out. When I thought about it, there were so many times we should have been caught, each possibility more humiliating than the last.

With a heavy sigh he stepped towards the window, his hands running through his hair. “Seattle,” he began, the bitterness already apparent in his voice. “That night I left and had dinner downtown…the night you stayed…I ran into an old college friend at dinner.”

He shook his head and laughed sharply, the sound harsh and ugly in the silence. “I had no idea he was staying in the same hotel.” He paused, pressing his palm against the glass. “Apparently he saw us together… leaving the elevator after being on the roof.”

My stomach dropped as I remembered the moment with perfect clarity. I recalled the feel of his lips on mine as we kissed and stumbled, making our way to my room. He had seemed uncharacteristically carefree as he touched me, each of us lost in the other, completely unaware that we were being watched.

I nodded robotically.

“I’m not sure why he came to my father, although I’d be lying if I said I was surprised.”

“Why?” I asked numbly, knowing the answer didn’t matter.

“He mentioned something about wanting a move to Chicago…I just…” He laughed again humorlessly, his hand dragging roughly across his chin. “I guess he has no qualms about cutting throats in an attempt to get to the top.”

I nodded again, more to myself than as a response to anything he said. One by one the pieces began to fall together and suddenly, the panic that had been flitting on the edges of my mind began to make itself known. Carlisle knew, Esme would know. My father would probably find out, as well as everyone at the company when the news of my transfer was announced. My new boss… everyone would think that I… I felt myself sway slightly and leaned forward to grip the desk, attempting to swallow as a wave of nausea swept over me. My stomach began to churn, and although I felt like I was gasping, no air seemed to be reaching my lungs. My throat felt dry, as if it was tightening with each labored breath and my body began to tremble with the effort.

“Chloe?” Bennett turned and began to walk towards me, the worry unmistakable in his voice. “Are you okay?”

I shook my head and closed my eyes, attempting to calm my breathing; the sound of my pulse pounded in my ears.

“I know how you must feel, but-“

“You what?” I asked, a spark of anger igniting in my chest at his words.

“I know how you must feel,” he said again, stopping in front of me and taking my hands in his. “But it will be fine. We’ll get through this and it will all be fine.”

“How can you say that?” I asked, shocked at his nonchalance and tore my hands from his. “How can you say it will be *fine*?”

“Because it will be,” he answered, keeping his tone calm. “This will blow over, everyone will forget.

Don’t let them win, Chloe.”

An angry tear slipped down my cheek at the suggestion that I was somehow giving up, letting the proverbial *them* win.

“Chloe, I need you to calm down.” He placed his hands on either side of my face and looked into my eyes. “There are people out there,” he said, motioning towards the outer office. “And this isn’t the place to have this discussion.”

I nodded, knowing he was right and instinctively leaned into him, wrapping my arms around his waist and pressing my forehead against his chest. I shivered slightly as his arms encircled me, pulling me to him as if he could protect me from anything.

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If only he could.

I held him closer as his lips brushed against my hair, taking comfort in his touch, his smell, his closeness. For one small moment I felt the world and the weight of the last few minutes slip away. I loved him and I let him love me in return.

The initial panic receded briefly as I stood wrapped in his embrace. My lungs seemed to open, the wild thumping of my heart slowing to a near normal pace as his palm made small circles on my back.

“I love you, Chloe,” he murmured into my hair. “It will be okay. Somehow things will work out.”

Closing my eyes tightly against the tears, I nodded silently; my ability to translate my jumbled, erratic thoughts into words seemed to have left me.

Our moment of peace was short lived as hushed voices began to filter in from

the reception area.

Bennett cleared his throat and pulled away slightly, bending his knees to bring him level with my eyes.

“Are you okay?” His eyebrows were drawn together, the worry evident in his pained expression.

“I just…” I began, my brief respite of calm beginning to slip. “I need to go.” My voice was nothing more than a whisper and his concern seemed to deepen.

“Chloe-“

I shook my head. “I can’t….it’s just too much right now”

He straightened and sighed deeply. “Can I see you tonight?”

I attempted to swallow around the lump in my throat. My mouth felt dry, and I found myself once again fighting the urge to be sick. My eyes fell to the floor briefly, and I wrapped my arms around my body as I sought to hold myself together.

“I just…” I began, only to have the words vanish from my mind. I shook my head again and pressed my palms to his chest. “I just need to go for a little bit. I promise I’ll call.”

I turned to leave, only to be pulled back into his arms, his hand gripping my neck and his mouth finding mine. He kissed me passionately, his lips demanding, his hands tangling into my hair, pulling me into him.

“I love you,” he breathed against me. His hand slipped down my neck and shoulder to grasp my hand and bring it to his chest, his thumb brushing along the bracelet he’d given me. “Please remember that.”

“I love you too,” I said softly, my voice trembling.

Stepping away, I looked back at him briefly. His expression was grim as he watched me walk away, his eyes tight and full of concern.

As I entered the outer office, there was no doubt we’d been heard. The others in the room were scattered around, conveniently busy with tasks that allowed them to avoid making eye contact. I walked quickly to my office to retrieve my purse, making sure not to pass anyone on the way. I quickly reached my car and pulled out of the garage, beginning the familiar route to my apartment.

The world seemed to blur around me as I drove, finally allowing the tears to fall freely down my face, the sobs amplified in the silent interior. I replayed the scene in Carlisle’s office, the way he had avoided my eyes, a hint of having been betrayed resonating in his voice. It was as if I had disappointed my own father

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and I was unsure whether I would be able to fix it. Another sob broke from my chest as I imagined him telling Esme.

Esme who had been like a mother to me since losing mine, who had told me she loved me and looked at me with such pride, would know of the lies and the way I behaved.

Emmett would find out, Angela… my father. An utter feeling of anguish settled over me when I considered how far reaching my actions would be, and it was all I could do to make it home and drag myself out of the car and to the elevator.

As my apartment door closed behind me and I took in the familiar space, I closed my eyes tightly, waiting for the warmth and safety of my home to comfort me.

I found silence rather than comfort, emptiness rather than security. I walked into the kitchen and poured myself a glass of water, my eyes drifting to the pizza stone sitting on the counter, the clean plates and wine glasses from last night next to it. I remembered joking with him in this very room, the stolen kisses and the laughter. I saw us sitting in my living room, his head in my lap as he told me of his love and respect for his father.

My heart ached for how he must be feeling, having disappointed him.

I wiped my damp cheek as another round of silent tears fell.

I made my way to my room, ignoring the photos we spoke of as I passed, the couch we had made love on, and stopped at my bedroom door. The sight of my unmade bed, the tangled sheets and my discarded clothing still forgotten on the floor, was just another physical reminder of how perfect everything had been only hours before.

Moving to the bed, I kicked off my shoes and lay down, my face pressed against the very pillow he had slept on. His scent clung to the soft cotton, bringing with it the ache I always felt when we were apart.

Still dressed but uncaring, I pulled the thick down comforter over me, burying myself in its warmth.

I knew eventually I would get over the embarrassment; I could live with the looks and the questions, but what about Bennett? We'd disagreed in Carlisle's office over how people would react, and it had hurt that he was so quick to disregard my feelings. Could he live with the things people would inevitably say about me? People were going to talk, whether he believed they would or not.

The tears had subsided briefly, my sobs having ebbed into the occasional sigh and sniffle. I huddled into the safety of my bed, Bennett's smell all around me lulling me into a sort of comforting numbness.

My emotions were so conflicted; anger battled fear and dread, each one overtaking me briefly before a shift would occur and my thoughts would wander. I was angry at the man who had used our lives as pawns to prove himself. I was angry at Bennett for his naive optimism that things would work out and even angrier at myself for allowing things to go this far. Looking back, I saw all the foolish mistakes I had made to simply be near him. I should have asked for a transfer or quit or even stayed away.

I traced the delicate chain around my wrist and couldn't help but smile. I'd never be able to stay away. I'd been so scared; worried he would only want me for a physical relationship, thinking I could only be with him as long as I stayed. I had never imagined that he could actually return my feelings.

I thought back to how we'd been this morning; the tender touches, the passionate kisses. The hours of exploring each other's bodies, feeling him inside of me, wrapped in his unwavering embrace. The absolute adoration in his eyes whenever he caught my gaze. I knew he loved me; but would it be enough? Would he tire of the obstacles in our way?

I must have dozed at some point and was awakened by the low beep of my cell phone. Leaning over the edge of the bed, I pulled my purse towards me and retrieved it, five new text messages and four missed calls.

The texts were from Bennett, asking if I was home, making sure I was okay and asking me to call him when I could. The calls were from Angela, and my stomach clenched with anxiety as I wondered why she had called me so many times in the last fifteen minutes.

I called him first, my stomach sinking as it went straight to voicemail. I left a simple message and hung up to call Angela, jumping as the phone beeped in my hand, the words 'Angela Weber Work' appearing on the caller ID.

Swallowing loudly, I took a deep breath and answered.

"Oh my God! Chloe! Thank God you picked up. What the hell is going on?" she practically shouted into the phone.

"Hi, Angela," I answered timidly.

"Chloe, what's going on? Mr. Ryan is in with his brother and…" She paused and I knew it was worse than I thought. I could only imagine what he was facing in there.

PROOF EXCLUSIVE

“I can hear bits and pieces and…Chloe,” her voice dropped, her tone apologetic. “They’re talking about you.”

“I know,” I replied softly, surprised by how strange it felt to not deny it.

“Chloe?” she asked uncertainly, her voice more hesitant now.

“God, Angela, I’m so sorry. I never wanted to lie to you.” My voice shook and I bit my lip, terrified of what she would think of me when she knew. “Um… Bennett and I-”

“*Bennett*?” she said incredulously.

“Yes, Bennett and I, we’ve been…seeing each other.” I lowered my head slightly, wishing that it hadn’t taken something as drastic as this for her to find out.

“What? Oh my god, Chloe,” she said in a gentle, sympathetic voice. I could almost envision her face in my head, her fingertips pressing against her lips, her eyes wide in astonishment… her disappointment.

“I know,” I whispered, unable to bring my voice to a clearly audible level. “I’m so sorry, Angela.”

“Chloe, you don’t have to apologize to me. I’m your friend, regardless of what else is going on.” I realized again how lucky I was to have her in my life.

“Thank you. You have no idea how much that means to me.” A sharp knock came from the living room.” Listen, Angela, I have to go. Someone’s here, but I promise to call you later.”

We said our goodbyes and I walked down the hall to the door, surprised to be faced with a man holding a huge vase of the most beautiful pink flowers I’d ever seen.

“Chloe Mills?”

“Yes?”

He nodded and handed me a clip board. I signed quickly, handing it back to him and taking the flowers in exchange.

“Thank you,” I said absentmindedly, shutting the door.

I inhaled deeply as I walked into the kitchen, the delicate scent of orchids and calla lilies filling the large room. Placing the vase on the counter, I began looking for the card.

BOOKEEN EXCLUSIVE

My heart raced as I opened the small envelope tucked inside the profuse blooms, my mind temporarily unfocused on my problems. I bit my lip nervously, unabashedly excited at the prospect that he might have sent me flowers.

Pour la femme de mes rêves.

For the woman of my dreams.

Love, Your BB

I couldn't help but smile softly as I read the card, shaking my head at the way he'd slipped in my nickname for him.

For the woman of my dreams.

Those words would have filled me with such joy this morning, but now, as beautiful and heartfelt as they were, they struck a chord of anxiety in my chest. Leaning in again, I inhaled deeply, letting the sweet scent wash over me, thankful for this small moment of respite.

Replacing the card, I moved the vase to my dining room table and sat in contemplative silence, wondering how he always seemed to know exactly what I needed.

I'd been feeling apprehensive about his feelings, and he had somehow found a way to tell me he loved me in the exact moment I needed him to.

I'd been worried about my place in his life, and without a big show or unnecessary words, he'd given me his bracelet as I'd slept.

Even now as I worried about my future, disappointed in myself and how I had hurt the people around me, he'd somehow managed to bring a smile to my face.

Glancing at the time again, I groaned. There was no way I could sit here and wait to see what was happening. I needed a distraction and debated my options, finally deciding on a drive to take my mind off things.

I drove to the outskirts of the city, the windows down, the music up, and thought about everything that had happened. Was it really only hours ago that I had been on this same road with him? I thought over our conversation, the way he'd lost his temper as I mentioned David and the way I'd yelled back in return. I remembered the way he'd pressed me against the window in his office and the way my body had reacted despite my anger.

I remembered the way he'd taken me on his desk, each of us so lost in the other that we'd forgotten the world existed outside of us. He'd asked me to go to Paris and initially I'd been thrilled, but as he mentioned Christmas time, I

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

realized that he still planned on things being a secret months from now.

Had I thought that far ahead? I'd needed time, but what were my plans for telling everyone? Had I envisioned us still being a secret? I shook my head as I realized that wouldn't be a consideration now.

Everyone would know soon. I could only pray that we were strong enough together to survive it.

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An hour later, the elevator doors opened and I saw him at the end of the hall. He was muttering to himself, his jacket and tie on the floor, his hands running nervously through his hair as he paced in front of my door. *How long had he been here?*

I got within ten feet of him when he stopped, turning suddenly and clearing the distance between us in only a few steps to take me in hisarms. "Chloe," he breathed, his lips pressing into my hair as he held me close.

I hummed in response, my body relaxing instantly against him as I wrapped my arms around his neck.

Closing my eyes, I gave myself to the moment; relishing in the feel of his hard body pressed against mine, the way he smelled and the rightness of being in his arms. He lifted me slightly, my feet leaving the ground as we embraced. I felt his heart pound against my chest, his warm breath in my hair and his fingers as they traced small circles where he held me.

ENJOY EXCLUSIVE

"I love you," I sighed and placed a kiss against his neck as he slowly lowered me to the floor.

His hand held the back of my head as his eyes searched my face. I tried to read his expression. He seemed anxious, his brows knitted and his jaw locked, and it did nothing to calm the sense of unease looming over me. I placed my palm on his face, my thumb lightly smoothing the crease in his brow. I exhaled, a small sense of relief washing over me as I felt his features soften under my touch.

"Thank you," he said quietly. I nodded, understanding that he was thanking me for more than my declaration of love.

"You're welcome," I answered, my breath hitching as his thumb traced my bottom lip, his gaze falling to my mouth.

In small, almost tentative movements, he leaned into me, his soft lips brushing against mine for the briefest of moments before pulling away. He hesitated, our
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mouths hovering just a breath apart, his chest rising and falling in time with mine.

He breathed into my mouth and I shivered, his lips so close I could taste them, his breath warm and sweet on my tongue. I sensed a moment of uncertainly and moved to pull back, wanting to look into his eyes and question him. His grip tightened, a minute shake of his head causing me to relent.

“Stay,” he murmured into my mouth, tilting his head, his lips sweeping over mine.

Without a word, I could sense that something had changed. He was hesitant, treating me as if I might break or run away. My anxiety increased, my mind racing with the possibilities of what could have happened.

“Ben-” I started to question, the edge of panic already evident in that one small word. His other hand moved to cup my face, his thumb moving between us to press against my lips.

“Shh. Can we…can we just be *us*?” he whispered, pressing a tender kiss to the corner of my mouth.

“For just a little while? I promise, I *will* tell you everything,” he paused, his head tilting to brush his lips softly along mine. “But right now, I need to have this. *Please*.”

His simple plea broke through my worry and I lifted up onto my toes, closing the small distance between us to press my lips fully to his. He moaned softly at the contact, increasing the pressure but never deepening the kiss. I felt cradled in his hands, his love and adoration evident even now in the chaste and gentle way his lips pressed against mine.

He pulled away slowly, pressing one final kiss against my forehead before meeting my eyes.

“Can we go inside?”

“Of course,” I whispered, kissing him softly once more. “Are you okay?”

Nodding, he motioned towards the doorway, picking up his tie and jacket from the floor. He stood behind me then, taking my hand as I unlocked the door. He walked inside and tossed his jacket to the chair, leading us wordlessly to the couch, sitting with his back against the armrest and his long legs stretching out along the cushions. Guiding me down, I crawled into his lap, my head resting in the crook of his neck. I sighed as he wrapped his arms around me, his long fingers idly toying with the strands of my ponytail.

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I closed my eyes and tried to enjoy his closeness, pushing aside all the worries and frustrations for the moment.

His pulse thrummed beneath my ear, my body rising and falling softly with each breath as we sat in comfortable silence. Placing a kiss on my nose, his fingers moved down my side, resting on the expanse of skin visible above my waistband. I shivered slightly, a path of goose bumps following his touch as he moved under my shirt to my ribs and back down. He drew lazy circles on my back as I toyed with the buttons on the front of his shirt, my hand curving to the muscle and smooth planes of his chest and abdomen.

“Why do you love me?” he asked quietly.

I frowned slightly, surprised by his question.

“Because you let me be who I am and love me because of it,” I whispered against his neck. “You’re brilliant and kind. You love your family without question. You’re funny and sexy. You make me feel beautiful and smart,” I paused, placing a small kiss below his ear. “You make me want to be everything for you.”

His breathing stopped and he swallowed, the muscles in his neck flexing against my lips.

“You *are* everything to me,” he countered, moving to look into my eyes. “You know that, right?”

“I do,” I answered honestly. I knew we had so far to go, so many things to overcome, but his love was something I no longer questioned.

“Chloe,” he began, turning his body into me slightly and pulling my head back down to his shoulder.

“It wasn’t my intention to demean your concerns earlier. I would never do that, I just…this isn’t how I wanted people to find out about us,” he said tenderly, his voice apologetic. He had removed my ponytail, one hand now running through my hair, while the other brushed up and down my arm.

“I know,” I said softly, my fingers dipping into the open collar of his shirt, skimming along the light dusting of hair. Despite how our tempers often got the better of us, I knew in my heart that he hadn’t meant to be condescending.

“I think this can be a good thing, Chloe.”

“A good thing?” I asked confused, not understanding how he could possibly see this as being a good thing.

“Yes, we won’t have to hide anymore.” I felt my frustration ebb with his

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words as I imagined the possibility. “Things can just be normal.”

“What does normal mean? We’ve never done normal before. Do we even know *how*?” I questioned, a hint of fear seeping into my voice.

“We’ve done normal, we’ve just always hidden it,” he said softly, his lips brushing my cheek. I nodded, understanding what he meant. My chest ached as I remembered the quiet moments we’d shared, watching movies together, cooking dinner, learning about the other-moments just like this.

I wanted a lifetime of those.

“And I know this upset you earlier,” he began tentatively. “But you don’t *need* that job. I can take care of you.”

“I don’t want you to *have* to take care of me,” I countered, my tone edged in frustration. “I want to succeed on my own. I realize it may not seem like a career to you, but my job is important to me.”

He brushed a piece of loose hair behind my ear and sighed.

“I know that, baby, and I understand,” he said, his hand moving to rest on my hip. “But I don’t think people will react the way you think they will.”

“How can you say that?” I asked, pushing him away slightly to sit up. “Bennett, you may not think that people are going to talk, but you’re wrong. You need to prepare yourself for it instead of living in this dream world where you assume everyone will be happy that we love each other.”

His face contorted slightly as he sat up and turned toward me. “I’m not naive, Chloe. I know not *everyone* will understand, but I really don’t think it will be as bad as you think.”

“Bennett, you need to take a step back. Put yourself on the outside and think of how you would react seeing two people in our situation. Think about how you would see him; think about what your opinion would be of her. *Your* perspective comes from sitting in your big office, as a *man*.”

“What is *that* supposed to mean?” he asked through narrowed eyes, his tone sharp and bordering on anger.

“What it means is that you’re a man and I’m a woman. The world is going to judge us by two different standards, Bennett. No matter what. Because you’re an important man, you’ll always be known as the guy who slept with his secretary. It’s such a minor executive cliché that it’s not even worth judgement anymore.”

I could feel myself getting angrier by the second, no longer because of the situation, but because of his casual dismissal of it.

“And because I’m the woman, I’ll always be known as the gold digging whore who slept with her boss to get ahead.”

“So in turn, you’re saying that because I’m a man, you don’t think it’s possible that I could be equally as embarrassed by this as you are?” He glared at me, his chest heaving and his expression furious.

I flinched, not having ever considered that he could be embarrassed by this as well.

He stood and began pacing the room, his hands moving roughly into his hair.

“I understand that you’re upset, but I just…” he stopped in front of my fireplace and picked up the frame containing the photo of his parents and I. “You can’t allow other people to drive a wedge between what we have.”

“I’m not *allowing* anything,” I said, standing as well. “But I want you to be prepared, you *need* to be prepared. Because eventually, someone somewhere is going to say something, whether it’s to you or behind your back or even to me about what happened. Someone is going to call me a whore or call my integrity into question, and I need to be sure that you can handle that. Because regardless of what you think, it *will* happen. I’ve *seen* it happen in this very company. I don’t understand why you’re not getting it. Is it because you really don’t see it or you don’t want to? Because honestly, the fact that you aren’t even *trying* to understand is what is hurting me the most right now!”

“Chloe, that’s not what I meant at *all*,” he started, but I instantly cut him off.

“How am I ever going to face your parents again? What about *my* father? Or your brother?” I shot back, angry tears beginning to build in my eyes. “Judging from your face, I assume that conversation didn’t go over well.”

His forehead creased and he eyed me questioningly, his hand coming up to rub along a faint bruise forming on his jaw. “How did you know I talked to him?”

“Angela called,” I replied pointedly. “And that’s another thing. How am I ever going to walk back into that building again? Look my colleagues, my *friends* in the eye, and not feel their judgments being laid down upon me? How will *you*? Regardless of what we feel for each other, it’s not going to matter in the grand scheme of things, Bennett. Not to them. It will always be the boss and his secretary.

Always.”

“And you’re just thinking of this now, Chloe?” he retorted, driving his hands into his hair in frustration only to have them fall roughly to his sides a moment

later.

“I knew from that very first time that all this could happen, but imagining it and living it are two *very* different things. That’s why you have to be prepared, and I need to know that *you* won’t let this drive a wedge between us…that *you* won’t tire of the looks or the whispers and decide it’s not worth it.”

I wiped at my eyes angrily, attempting to brush away the tears that were now falling down my face.

“I don’t want to be the next Rachel,” I cried, a sob breaking in my chest. “I don’t want to be the one you tell the next woman about with no other explanation than *‘it just ended’*.”

He flinched, his face contorting as if he’d been slapped. Exhaling deeply, his eyes fell to the floor. We stood apart from each other in silence. My body trembled with repressed emotions. When he looked up, his face had paled, his features tensed.

“Chloe, I…” he said quietly, his voice weak and shaking slightly.

“No,” I snapped, shaking my head. “I can’t do this right now. You need to go to your parents and deal with this and I…” I paused, feeling myself tremble, a deep sigh shuddering through me. “I just need some time.”

He nodded, his gaze locked with mine, his jaw clenched. “Can I come back over tonight?”

Pain ripped through me, nearly taking my breath away. “I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“Okay,” he answered quietly. “If that’s what you want.”

It wasn’t what I wanted. What I *wanted* more than anything was to run into his arms and feel comforted by his touch. But I couldn’t. Not talking, not thinking was how we’d ended up like this to begin with.

We stood for another moment before he walked over and picked up his jacket, stopping next to me on his way to the door. His fingers brushed my arm and moved down to my hand.

“I love you, Chloe,” he said softly.

“Loving you isn’t the problem,” I answered, my eyes on the floor. He leaned in and kissed the side of my head, his lips lingering in my hair. I closed my eyes, another fresh wave of tears spilling from beneath my lids, and I bit my lip to keep myself from stopping him.

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With a resigned sigh, he straightened and walked to the door, closing it softly behind him.

The quiet click of the latch seemed to echo throughout my empty apartment.

I stood feeling as if I were rooted to the spot after he'd left, the tears falling silently down my cheeks. I swayed slightly, exhaustion and despair threatening to overwhelm me. Walking slowly to the door, I turned the lock and pressed my cheek against the cool wood.

The elevator chimed from down the hall and I heard the doors open. Closing my eyes tightly, a sob shook my body as I pictured him stepping inside and disappearing from my sight. The succession of chimes filtered through the door again signaling it's decent to the lobby.

I walked quickly to my room, stumbling as I tried to see through my teary vision, and collapsed on my bed. Once again I buried myself under the blankets and cried myself to sleep.

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Some time later, I awoke. With closed eyes, my hand slid along the cool sheets out of habit, recoiling instantly as I felt only the empty spot beside me. In that moment, reality slipped quickly back into my consciousness and I rolled onto my side, pulling my knees up to my chest.

I was unsure of the time, the sun having gone down and my room now blanketed in darkness and moonlight. My throat was sore, my mouth dry, and my face left raw from my unending tears. My body shook in the silence, my blurry eyes attempting to focus on the flashing red light from across the room. With a heavy sigh, I reluctantly crawled out of bed and picked up my phone, taking it with me back under the covers. My chest shuddered as I wiped my eyes with the sheet and pressed the message icon on my Blackberry.

Message after message from Bennett waited for me, some in English and some in French, but all bringing another wave of fresh tears with them.

6:32 pm - I still remember the first moment I realized I loved you.

6:44 pm - I know I've kept things from you. I'll tell you everything. Please give me the chance.

7:14 pm - Je ne peux pas vivre sans toi.

I copied and pasted the message into my browser to translate: *"I can't live without you."*

8:26 pm - Je suis à toi.
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I didn’t need the translation as I remembered the countless times he’d said it to me. *” I am yours.”*

9:12 pm - I want to be your everything too.

9:35 pm - I’m sorry. I understand now.

10:07 pm - Je vais t’aimer toujours.

I translated again and choked back a sob as I read the words, *“I am going to love you forever.”*

10:32 pm - Please say you still love me.

Running my finger along the screen, it broke my heart to imagine the desperation he must have felt as he typed those words. I loved him wholly, with every fiber of my being and every breath that I took. He consumed my body and every thought I had. The prospect of my life without him was crippling.

I looked at the time, the last message had been sent twelve minutes ago. He would be up, waiting for me to respond.

Would he really tell me everything? Did he really understand? I rolled over in bed and looked out into the darkness, my phone cradled against me. For the first time, a spark of hope ignited in my chest.

I loved him, absolutely. I knew in my heart that there would never be anyone else for me.

I thought back to Alice’s words. Was he worth risking everything?

Without a doubt.

Even before realizing that I loved him, I’d known that my life had been forever changed. I’d always known and accepted that when he was gone, he would take my heart with him.

Closing my eyes, I remembered the way he’d asked why I loved him, the timid and unsure tone of his voice that I’d never heard before. I thought back to my answers, feeling the truth of them even now.

Glancing at the clock again, I considered sending him a text. Maybe I could call him, or even… I pictured the look of surprise on his face as he opened the door to find me there, the way he would take me in his arms and kiss me. I sat up, the ache in my chest already beginning to recede. Reaching for his pillow, I held it to me, closing my eyes and inhaling deeply. His scent still clung to the material and I remembered how it felt to lay next to him, his warm skin pressed against my naked body, the way he touched me and whispered tenderly in the dark.

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I reread his texts, and my mind was made up.

I would go to him. I would tell him I wanted to be his, for as long as he wanted.

Climbing out of bed, I washed my face and brushed my hair, putting my phone in my purse before stepping out the door. I made it to my car and pulled out of the garage, thankful for the light traffic at this hour. In no time flat I was pulling up, returning a small smile as the doorman greeted me and opened the door for me to proceed inside.

My nerves began to get the better of me as I passed through the gleaming bronze elevator doors.

Pressing the button for his floor, I retrieved my phone again and reread his texts, attempting to reassure myself that I was doing the right thing. The lift came to a stop, and I took a final calming breath before stepping out into the elegant, brightly lit hallway.

I stopped abruptly at the sight before me.

Just down the hall, he stood outside his door, his hands holding the face of a beautiful blonde woman.

I blinked several times, sure that this couldn't be real, hoping a different sight awaited me each time I opened them. My mind told me there had to be an explanation, there was no way this could be what it appeared to be, but my heart… I saw that she had been crying, but these were happy tears. She smiled at him adoringly, and he smiled back.

They whispered to each other in French and I watched as he brought her left hand to his mouth, placing a single kiss on the back of her fingers. She leaned in and whispered, his arms wrapped around her, their bodies rocking back and forth in the quiet hallway, oblivious to me or anything else around them

My vision clouded as I watched their tender embrace, the way her hands moved through his hair and how he buried his face into her neck.

I shook my head as numbness crept over me. I hadn't realized I'd moved until my back pressed against the interior of the elevator. With shaky fingers I blindly pressed buttons, the doors closing quietly, taking them from my line of sight. I reached for my glasses and wiped my wet face with trembling hands, barely noticing the sound of them dropping to the carpet.

The silence surrounded me, the only sound being the hum of the elevator as it moved through the shaft.

Was I breathing?

The doors opened and I stepped out.

“Ms. Mills?” A voice called to me. “Miss, are you okay?”

I shook my head and waved it off, continuing to my car.

Pulling out of the garage, I made a left turn and headed down the empty street, moving as if on autopilot. I swiped my key card and pulled into the spot labeled ‘Chloe Mills’ for what would be the last time.

The lobby was empty as I made my way across the glossy floors to the familiar gold elevator, my mind focused on only one task.

The art deco light fixtures were dimmed, round pools of light stretched along the carpet. My mind drifted to another night like this. I recalled hurried steps, my arms full of spreadsheets, and my focus on the man I knew would be waiting in the conference room down the hall.

Unlocking my office, I stepped inside, turning on the small lamp that sat on my desk. My eyes scanned the room, seeing moments instead of things.

With a deep breath, I crossed the room to his office, the scent of wood and leather and *him* filling the air. The city lights of Chicago shone through the large windows and I walked determinedly into his bathroom, removing an empty box from the shelf over his dry cleaning I knew would be there. As I turned to leave, my eyes fell to a ball of discarded cotton behind the trash can. Bending to retrieve it, a searing pain crept through my chest, spreading out until it nearly consumed me.

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I held his shirt in my hands, my fingers touching the lose threads where the buttons had been torn loose. Without thinking, I brought it to my nose and inhaled deeply, taking him in. Eyes burning with unshed tears, I wiped at my cheeks out of pure habit.

I fought with myself to toss his shirt aside, to do the smart thing just this once and push him away, but I knew I couldn’t. With a defeated sigh, I stood, carefully folding the material and stepping out of the bathroom.

Without another glance, I returned to my desk. The shirt was the first thing to go inside the box, quickly followed by the contents of my drawers.

“Chloe?”

I jumped and turned quickly, my stomach dropping to see Carlisle standing in the open doorway. He looked tired, his impeccably groomed appearance, so much like his son’s, slightly disheveled. His jaw was clenched, a deep crease

stood between his brows, and a pained expression on his face.

“Carlisle,” I began sheepishly, my gaze downcast. I couldn’t look at him; I couldn’t stand to see the disappointment in his eyes. “I didn’t think anyone would be here.”

“Chloe,” he sighed, crossing the room to stand in front of me. “I think we need to talk.”

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EIGHTEEN - VÉRITÉ

Bennett's POV

The door closed quietly, the soft click reverberating down the long hallway. I stood, the sound of my own breathing echoing in my ears; a stunned, pulsing silence all around me.

My hand lingered, my grasp tightening around the cool metal as if it was my last link to her.

I couldn't bring myself to let go.

With a pained sigh, I finally loosened my hand, watching my fingers fall away and my arm drop heavily to my side. I couldn't seem to move. I wished more than anything that I could take it all back and still be standing beside her. I ached for her with an intensity I'd never felt before, as if I'd left a piece of myself on the other side of the door.

Reluctantly pushing away, I turned toward the elevator, surprised my feet could even move from the spot. In all the time that we had been together, she'd never turned me away. Even at the worst of times, when we did nothing but try to tear each other apart, she'd *never* said no.

And I'd never felt this empty.

I managed to make it to my car, ignoring faces and voices as I passed. My hand fumbled with the handle of the shiny black Porsche. The action usually gave me an adrenaline rush; now I longed only for the impending comfort as it sheltered me behind its dark, tinted glass.

Leaning my head back against the leather seat, my fists clenched painfully at my side, I stared unseeingly at the sunroof above me. The darkening sky and emerging stars did not register in my mind; my focus still lingered on the woman sixteen floors above me, her red eyes and broken expression burned forever in my vision.

A break in the numbness appeared and my fist collided with the steering wheel. The pain shooting up my arm was a welcome reprieve from the almost suffocating weight that had settled inside my chest.

I flexed my fingers and inspected the damage, wincing at my stupidity.

Closing my eyes, I attempted to fill my lungs. I breathed in deeply, but the smell of Chloe surrounded me and my chest expanded painfully. Suddenly the

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acute feeling of her all around me and inside my head overwhelmed me, the pain in my hand fading to a dull, throbbing ache.

It will be okay. It has to be okay.

I repeated the words in a rhythmic loop in my mind, clinging to them as if wanting it enough could bring it to fruition.

My phone vibrated in my pocket, the sound of the low buzz both startling and irritating me. I exhaled deeply, clenching my jaw and trying to halt any hope I had that it could be her. I peered at it through tired eyes, the disappointment instant although expected as an unrecognized number I'd seen several times today appeared on the caller ID.

Kneading my temples, I clenched my jaw and exhaled forcefully, attempting to quell the rapid agitation I felt at the insistent unknown caller, the situation, myself…fuck, even Chloe. I couldn't deal with work right now. Hell, I couldn't deal with *anyone* right now. Without another thought, I silenced the call and tossed the annoyance onto the seat beside me.

Starting the car, I revved the engine, the soothing hum a momentary and welcome distraction from the empty, hollow feeling that had settled in my stomach. I pressed the clutch and shifted smoothly, forcing myself to focus on the rhythm of changing gears and gentle purring of the machine surrounding me. Driving toward the parking lot exit, I kept my eyes forward, my gaze never wavering to the familiar silver car parked on my right as I passed.

My tires squealed as I turned onto the busy street and I watched in my rear view mirror as the apartment building and the woman it held faded into the distance. I began the familiar drive to my parents' home, knowing that what awaited me there would not be pleasant. I was torn between wanting to get this over with and just wanting to go home and drink myself into a stupor, forgetting this day had ever happened.

Pulling up in front of the large house, I shut off the engine and waited.

The minutes ticked by; the sky grew darker and yet, courage still eluded me. My father had been furious today - restrained, but furious.

My brother on the other hand… I rubbed my jaw absentmindedly again and winced, remembering his expression of complete disbelief and betrayal when he'd realized that I'd lied to him. Restraint had never been his strong point. It had most certainly eluded him today.

The one person I had yet to deal with was my mother. I looked up at the

house, glowing brightly in the fading light, my eyes focusing on the window of the room where I was sure she sat waiting for me. Knowing I was being a coward, I put my phone in my pocket and climbed out, moving slowly up the illuminated walkway. If I could handle my father, my brother, and Chloe angry in one day, I could certainly handle this…I hoped.

Just as I reached the door, it opened. My father stood waiting for me, an uncharacteristically worn expression on his face. I found myself pondering all the battles he'd had to fight on my behalf today.

"Hey Dad," I said quietly.

"Son," he replied in greeting, opening the door wider and allowing me to pass. "Your mother is upstairs waiting for you."

I nodded in acknowledgment and made my way to the staircase. My hand ran along the smooth mahogany banister, the wood familiar and comforting under my palm. I reached the third floor and continued down the hall, pausing as I passed the infrequently used door. Unable to turn away, I turned the antique knob, compelled to see it again.

I stepped into the bathroom and closed the door softly behind me, flipping the switch and squinting as the room became bathed in artificial light.

Everything looked as it did that day, minus the sunlight streaming in through the open window, the breeze gently lifting the gauzy curtain, and the woman I loved meeting my gaze in the dressing table mirror.

I remembered how possessive I'd felt that afternoon, how I'd wanted to claim her and mark her as my own. Had I loved her even then? Had she already captured my heart with the same unbreakable hold she'd had on my body?

My fingers traced the phone in my pocket, my desire to give her what she'd asked for-time- battling with my need to stay connected to her.

I slipped the phone out and typed the words haunting my mind.

I still remember the first moment I realized I loved you.

I pressed send without hesitation. I didn't expect her to answer, and I shook my head realizing her phone would most likely be off. Regardless, the simple act of telling her everything, even in small pieces over my phone, afforded me a small bit of comfort.

I turned, placing my hand on the door, and closed my eyes as I remembered roughly pressing her eager body against it.

"*You see, he wants something that's mine, and he can't have it.*"

I recalled how it felt to say those words out loud, how the truth buried in my growl had pulled something primal from inside of me.

"I can do anything I want, Mr. Ryan," she'd replied, although I could hear the uncertainty in her voice even then . *"And I am not yours."*

I smiled in spite of my mood. Was that true? Or had she already belonged to me in the same way that I'd belonged to her? I walked to the table, my fingers running over the small glass bottles placed there, remembering the sound they'd made as I'd taken her against it. I'd been unrelenting, almost cruel as I'd spoken to her.

"Do you want him?" I'd asked roughly as rage began to boil inside me. *"Answer me."* Her eyes had borne into mine, her chest heaving, but she didn't speak .*"Do you see him?"* I'd asked as my hands slid over her breasts. *"Look at him."* My fingers moved down her abdomen, along her skirt and to her thighs. *"Does he make you feel like this?"*

I'd taken her with such force, wanting to punish her for tormenting me, for filling my head with images of what I couldn't have.

Now when I thought of the things I'd done… My stomach dropped and a wave of nausea coursed through me as I remembered. Why hadn't I just told her? Why hadn't I been honest… about *everything*? My fear of what I'd felt had brought out something cowardly and frightened in me, propelling me to protect any feeling I had. It was so unlike me and yet it defined our entire beginning.

Her words from tonight replayed in my mind.

"I don't want to be the next Rachel. I don't want to be the one you tell the next woman about with no other explanation than 'it just ended'."

I leaned on the table, sitting on the small stool, my eyes closed tightly against the image of her tear stained face. I'd done that… and she was right. She expected me to hide how I felt, because I *had.* She expected dissemblance and vague answers. How many times had she attempted to ask me? How many times had I shut her down or evaded an answer? I wouldn't make that same mistake again.

I sent another message, praying when she saw it that she'd believe me.

I know I've kept things from you. I'll tell you everything. Please give me the chance.

Taking a deep breath, I stood, steadying myself before I walked to the door. With my hand on the knob I turned, letting my eyes travel around the room

again, silently promising myself that if given the chance, I'd make it right.

Stepping into the hall, I continued toward the music room, the soft notes of a piano drifting through the closed door. I knocked softly and she called for me to enter. I stepped into the room that held so many memories for me throughout my childhood.

My mother sat with her back to me, her fingers moving gracefully over the keys, and even now I was unable to stop the small smile that pulled at the corners of my mouth.

She'd always loved to play, even forcing Emmett and me to take lessons as children. We were terrible.

We would whine and complain until she eventually relented, playing as we built forts and raced Hot Wheels beneath the piano. I still remembered the way we would watch her feet depress the pedals, the way each chord vibrated above our heads.

She paused and turned, silently motioning for me to sit beside her. I walked across the room as she resumed playing, taking a seat on the bench next to her. We sat in silence for several minutes, the notes of the perfectly tuned instrument and her melody the only sound between us. Her playing slowed, drifting into something calm and soft, and I felt her sigh beside me.

"I'm sorry," I breathed as I watched her fingers run along the keys.

"This isn't how I raised you, Bennett," she murmured, her voice calm yet ringing with disappointment.

"I know."

"And this has been going on for how long?"

I placed my palms on my thighs, attempting to still the nervous fidgeting. "Months, weeks…I'm not even sure."

"When Chloe was here for dinner?" she asked in a knowing tone.

I grimaced and swallowed. "Yes."

"Hmm."

Her seemingly indifferent reaction took me by surprise, and I tilted my head to see her; my face contorted in frustration as I attempted to decipher her expression.

Her voice remained quiet and controlled. "That explains a few things, I suppose. But not *everything.* "

EBOOKFRENZY

“I know,” I began, running my fingers through my hair roughly. “I was such an ass to her.”

“To be honest, the very first time I met Chloe, I fell in love with her. She reminded me so much of you…” she said, her voice wistful and far away for a moment. “But I gave up on that thought the moment I saw the two of you together. It was obvious almost immediately that you two were toxic for each other. Despite my attempts to smooth things over, it seemed as if it only got worse. I never dreamed…” She trailed off again briefly and then sighed. “Like I said, I guess it makes sense now.” She shook her head slightly, running her fingers between the black keys.

“I only know what your father has told me.” She paused, her fingers stilling mid-movement. “But I want to hear it from *you*, Bennett. Help me understand. How do you feel about her?”

“I love her, Mom. More than anything,” I answered immediately. She nodded slowly as she digested my answer.

“And Chloe?”

I paused, my eyes downcast, closing as a moment of doubt entered my mind for the first time.

“Yes,” I answered softly.

“Yes?” She bent forward to catch my gaze.

“I mean… she *did*. We’ve both said it, but…” I trailed off, unable to articulate the fear that had been growing steadily since leaving Chloe’s apartment.

The room fell into silence as she turned, taking my hand in hers.

“Tell me.”

I swallowed and exhaled deeply, focusing on the comfort and warmth of my mother’s hand. “I…I haven’t been honest about everything, about the way I treated her in the past, about Rachel…” I trailed off, seeing how each mistake trumped the one before it. “About a *lot* of things.”

She waited for me to continue, but what more could I possibly say? I had done so many things *wrong*, and I had absolutely no idea how I could make it right again. After a long moment, she drew in a slow, deep breath and gave my hand a gentle squeeze.

“You know, your father and I have only ever wanted happiness for you and your brother, regardless of who you might find it with. If you struggled with your feelings so much and felt so torn, Bennett, I wish you had come talk to me.

ESCORT EXCLUSIVE

I wish you had come talk to *any* of us who know you." Her eyes fell, a pained look returning to her features.

I was reminded again of the pain that I had caused the two most important women in my life by being selfish, and my chest constricted. I began to talk, explaining every detail I could to her: the attraction I'd felt to Chloe for so long, the inescapable draw she held for me, the realization in Seattle that I truly loved her, and everything between us that had only deepened since. As good as it felt to finally tell *some* one about this, voicing everything that I had ever censored with Chloe, it still left so many things unfinished; the one person who needed to hear these things was the woman who had been hurt by them the most.

I had no idea how long we sat there talking, or how long we sat in silence afterward before she linked her arm through mine and leaned her head against my shoulder.

"She loves you, Bennett. There's not a doubt in my mind about that. But *you* need to make this right, and I have every faith that you will." Her voice remained quiet, but was now infused with the familiar soft comfort that had always calmed me.

"I don't even know where to start, Mom. I've hurt her so many times; what if this was her breaking point?"

She shook her head, placing her palm on my cheek to meet her gaze. "Bennett, she couldn't stay away from you even when she thought she despised you. Give her some time, and then be the man your father and I raised you to be. Be honest with her and tell her everything that she deserves to know.

Let *her* make that decision instead of assuming how she will handle it and making it for her. And above all, respect her feelings. She loves you, and you hurt her. Own that."

I nodded slowly as she leaned over and kissed my cheek, taking my hand as we stood to go see my father.

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What seemed like hours later, I stepped out into the cool night air and chelled my phone, unsurprised that there were no messages. I shook it off and walked to my car. She had asked for time, and I would give it to her, but I wouldn't give up. I pressed the screen and used the illumination it provided to type out yet another message, words I had whispered to her over and over.

Je suis à toi

PROOF EXCLUSIVE
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I am yours.

I pressed send, watching as the message disappeared and the screen darkened again. I swallowed and rubbed my hand against my chest, attempting to dispel the hollow feeling that was slowly returning. I stood in the darkness, my hand on the handle of my car door and looked out into the night. What was she doing right now? Had she received my messages or were all my pleas and words of love still sitting untouched inside her phone? I hoped it was the latter.

The drive home was long and solitary, the radio off, my phone silent on the seat next to me. I thought back to earlier on the couch, the way she'd felt in my arms, the way I'd needed to have that moment of normalcy with her before we even spoke of anything else. I'd worked myself into a frenzy by the time she'd gotten home, pacing in front of her apartment like some kind of a stalker. I'd realized that even with all that had happened between us we meant to each other, none of her neighbors would even know who I was. I didn't have a key to her apartment, she didn't have a key to mine. Everything seemed so temporary - something I was certainly going to change if given the chance.

I'd noticed immediately that she'd changed out of her ruined dress and into something more comfortable. Her eyes were red, her expression pained and worried. The moment I saw her I couldn't stop myself. The weight I'd been feeling inside my chest disappeared, and I almost ran to her, needing to feel her in my arms. I sighed in relief, pulling her to me and lifting her nearly off the ground as I just breathed, letting her familiar scent and nearness wash over me.

"I love you," she'd whispered and I closed my eyes, a tremor moving through me as her lips pressed against my neck. With those three words, she brought me home and everything else fell away.

"Thank you," I'd murmured, my eyes falling to her lips. I pulled her to me and felt her shiver in my arms, so thankful she was still as affected by this as I was.

I waited, wanting to savor the moment, my eyes falling closed as I tasted her breath and felt the perceptible warmth of her lips so close to my own. What if this was the last time I felt this? Would she run when she learned of all that was discussed today? That more people actually knew, that our little secret was in reality not so secret after all. I could see that she sensed my worry as she pulled away. I needed to calm her fears in return. The others had kept quiet; surely it wouldn't be as big an issue as she anticipated. I knew my father and brother didn't agree, but it wouldn't matter in the grand scheme of things. We were in love. People would see that.

I'd kissed her softly and followed her through the door, moving immediately

to the large couch before pulling her down to me.

For a long while, I simply held her, my fingers running along her smooth skin and tangling in her hair.

Her warm hands brushed along my chest and I found myself trying to memorize each and every moment, to burn into my brain how it felt to be with her like this. I'd placed kisses against her hair and tried to quell the worry I couldn't seem to shake.

"Why do you love me?" I'd asked, not really thinking about the words before they'd fallen from my lips. Her answer had been surprising, not merely because of how she viewed me, but more the way she saw herself. Didn't she know that she was the world to me? She held my heart in her hands, and I would never be able to give it to another.

A horn honked behind me, shaking me from my thoughts. I glanced up at the green light and accelerated, traveling the small distance that remained until I was home. As I pulled into my space and shut off the engine, I reached for my phone again and without a second thought, typed out another message.

Je vais t'aimer toujours

I am going to love you forever.

My mind was still with her as I made my way from the elevator. Closing the door behind me, I scanned the apartment. Even in the dark, I could tell the housekeeper had been here; the smell of wood polish and disinfectants now hung in the air instead of Chloe's lingering scent.

With a frown, I tossed my keys and wallet to the counter and walked into the kitchen, grabbing a bottle of water and ignoring the flashing message indicator on my answering machine. I knew it wasn't her, and everything else could wait. Crossing the room, I stopped in front of the large windows and looked out into the Chicago night. The view was no less beautiful than it was any other night, but I didn't *want* to look out at the familiar skyline. I didn't want to appreciate its glow and symmetry alone.

I wanted to watch Chloe as she took in the lights and the angles of the city, her eyes moving over the landscape and her lips curving into a smile. I wanted to wonder if she was remembering the first time we were together. I needed to reshape that memory, to give her the context she so desperately needed. She needed to know how she had owned me from our very first touch.

I wanted to wash every memory we had with levity, with a new perspective. I wanted to laugh together at our antics, understanding better how we had tried too

hard to hide the inevitable. I wanted to celebrate where we'd ended up.

Had it only been twenty-four hours since we'd laughed and teased, making pizza together in the middle of the night? Since I'd made love to her in her bed?

I pressed my palms against my eyes as I tried to shut out the image of her underneath me, the way she'd whispered my name, and the feel of her nails digging into my dampened skin. Raking my hands through my hair, I saw my reflection in the glass.

I looked pathetic.

I finished my water in one long draw and turned, tossing the empty bottle to the couch as I passed. I crossed to my room, unbuttoning my shirt as I went, slipping it off my shoulders and dropping it to the floor. In the dim light, I could see that my bed was perfectly made; the sheets would be crisp and new. All traces of Chloe would be gone. I stood in the doorway and swayed slightly.

It was as if she'd never been here.

The pain in my chest gripped me and my lungs continued to feel empty even as I took deep, gasping breaths. I fell to my bed and clutched the pillow, my eyes shut tightly against the images that flashed behind my closed lids. So many memories, just scattered pictures that moved through my mind, some so real I could almost smell her orange shampoo. Feel her pressed against me. Lose myself in the heat from her body.

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I remembered a night just like this, here in my apartment with dinner finished and forgotten on the table. We'd kissed like teenagers on the couch. The voices of Grace Kelly and Jimmy Stewart on the TV faded into the background as my every thought and breath focused on the woman in myarms. Her lips were soft as they teased and pulled mine. Her hands were so enthusiastic as they'd rid me of my shirt and traveled across my skin, tracing my arms, my chest and my stomach. Her eyes, wide with urgency and darkened with lust, raked hungrily over my body, making me feel like I was everything she'd ever need.

Our kisses had slowed as the night progressed, the movie flickering in the darkness. A new feeling, that just being together could be enough, began to settle over us. As she'd made her way down my body, she'd rested her head on my bare stomach, her hair fanning out and tickling my skin. Her fingers brushed absentmindedly along the waistband of my jeans, triggering my muscles to clench with each pass. My hands moved to her hair and my fingers ran through the soft strands as I watched the way the blue glow from the TV reflected off each one.

Soon after, her breathing evened out, her body stilled, and soft snores drifted up to me. I'd smiled as I realized she'd fallen asleep. That she was so comfortable here, in my home, in my arms, meant more to me than I could have ever thought possible.

We stayed that way as the movie ended, her contented sighs and occasional murmurs making my heart swell with a still unspoken emotion.

I'd picked her up gently and carried her to my bed, undressing her in the muted city lights that fell across the room. She'd stirred as I slipped off my jeans and climbed in next to her, sighing my name into the darkness. I'd pulled her to me, my hushed words whispered into her hair.

"Shh, baby. I'm right here."

She'd calmed instantly against me, her limbs tangling with mine, her warm breath drifting over my skin.

And we'd slept.

For the first time, I'd simply held her in my arms and fallen asleep without needing to be physical first. Unbidden images briefly entered my mind of a lifetime of nights like this. I'd quickly pushed them aside as I'd fallen asleep, content for the moment just to hold the woman I had fallen in love with.

As the memory faded back into my empty room, my heart pounded in my chest as panic swept over me in an ice cold wave.

I *couldn't* lose her.

For the first time in my life I was unafraid, ready to give myself completely and belong to another person. Did she still want me? I looked at the time. It had been hours and she hadn't responded. Was she telling me something? I needed to know. My rational mind knew that she was just taking the space she needed, but my heart was breaking. With shaking hands, I took out my phone and sent her one final message.

Please say you still love me.

I pressed send just as exhaustion took me. The rest would have to be up to her.

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Two sounds woke me from my brief escape into sleep: my phone vibrating on the pillow next to me and an insistent knock filtering in from the living room. My eyes fluttered as I tried to fight consciousness, not wanting to break the surface back into reality. I blinked as the room came into focus and looked at the
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time, wondering who would be at my door this late. My heart leapt as I realized it could be Chloe. As quickly as I could move, I flung myself off the bed, grabbing my shirt as I raced out of the room. My body vibrated with the anticipation of having her in my arms again.

I was unprepared for what greeted me on the other side of the door.

"Rachel?" I gasped, unable to hide the shock I felt at seeing her here.

"Bennett," she breathed, dropping her phone from her ear, relief visibly washing over her. "I was becoming so worried about you."

She stepped forward, wrapping her arms around my frozen body. I blinked several times as she embraced me, stunned by the familiar way she fit against me and the way she sounded. I slowly circled my arms around her waist.

"I can't believe you're here," I said into her hair as her familiar scent washed over me, the year since we'd seen each other last seeming to disappear. I closed my eyes tightly. The day had been so stressful and I was overwhelmed by the fact that she was at my door. "What…I don't understand." I pulled back and took her face in my hands, searching her features. She was even more beautiful than I remembered.

"I know," she answered, shaking her head slightly and wiping tears from her face.

"Are you okay?" I whispered, easily slipping into the French I'd spoken almost exclusively for six years.

She smiled brightly, her entire face lighting up. "Bennett, I just had to tell you. I'm getting married!"

"You're what?" I exclaimed, unable to contain my smile in return. I took her left hand, thrilled to see the beautiful ring she wore on her finger. Bringing it to my lips, I kissed it gently. "God, I'm *so* happy for you, Rachel."

She leaned in and whispered, "I'm okay now, Bennett. It's okay." Her simple statement eased something inside my chest, the guilt I'd been carrying around all this time lifting at her words. I wrapped my arms around her tightly.

"Thank you," I breathed, my arms tightening around her, relishing the quiet deliverance, the release I had so desperately needed.

She pulled back to meet my eyes and her smile faltered, her forehead creased with concern.

"Bennett?" She searched my face, surely taking in my red eyes and exhausted appearance. "Bennett, what's wrong?" she asked, her voice panicked and her

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expression suddenly alarmed.

Looking down briefly, I swallowed, ready to deny it as my mind began working on the hundreds of excuses for my current state. But when I looked up again, I knew there was no point in lying to her.

Rachel had been the first woman I'd loved, the only woman besides Chloe I'd ever been emotionally close. I needed to be honest, starting now.

"Why don't you come on in," I said, stepping back and motioning toward my door.

She nodded and preceded me inside. I watched as she sat down on the couch, her gaze flickering around my apartment, taking it all in and surely seeing pieces of me that she remembered. I sat next to her and ran my hands through my hair, trying to decide where to begin.

"Bennett, you don't have to tell me everything. I just want to make sure you're alright," she said softly, leaning forward and placing her hand on my knee.

I smiled, taking her hand in mine. Despite everything that had occurred between us, that she would offer me her friendship meant more to me than I could ever express.

"I'm fine," I began, laughing and shaking my head. "Okay, that's a fucking lie. I'm not fine." I ran my hands roughly across my face and leaned back into the couch. "I'm an idiot, and I've let the best thing in my life get away from me because I was too big of a coward to be honest with her." I stopped suddenly, realizing how that must sound. "Oh, God. Rachel I di-"

"No," she stated, holding her hand up in protest. "Don't be sorry you've found someone, Bennett. I won't lie…I spent a lot of time being angry with you, hurting and wondering why you couldn't love me enough to stay…but I've moved on. *We've* moved on." She smiled and reclaimed my hand. "I see now that you were right, that just loving someone isn't enough, that you must wait until you find your heart." She looked down at her ring, her joy so palpable it could hardly be contained. "I've found it.

And he's perfect."

She beamed at me and I couldn't help but smile back. I knew *exactly* what she was talking about. I listened happily as she told me about how they met, how their relationship grew and how she knew he was the one she was meant to be with.

With a soft, contented sigh, she paused. “Now that I’ve gone on and on,” she said with a laugh. “Tell me about this woman who has so obviously stolen your heart.”

I told her everything: the stupid way I’d handled things, how terrified I was that she would never let me fix us, and how I knew Chloe was the woman I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. And like the wonderful person she was, she listened… and she was happy for me.

We continued to catch up for a while after that. Being together like this was so natural, like long lost friends reuniting.

“Wait a minute,” I started, suddenly realizing I had no idea how she had gotten here. “What are you doing in Chicago? I mean, I thought you were still in Paris.”

“I was. We, Ethan and I, are in Chicago overnight. He’s actually in the bar downstairs making a few phone calls,” she paused, looking uncharacteristically uncomfortable for a moment. I leaned forward and squeezed her hand in reassurance. She smiled in acknowledgement before continuing. “Would you like to meet him?”

To be honest, I just wanted this night to be over. After everything that had occurred today, heading downstairs to socialize sounded like the last thing I wanted to do. But looking into her eyes and seeing the utter happiness reflected back at me, I knew I needed to meet and thank the man responsible.

“Of course,” I said softly, chuckling at the squeal of delight that escaped her. “Give me a second to clean up and we’ll head down.”

She nodded, standing to look around as I headed into my room. Changing my shirt quickly and chelling in the mirror, I paused at the doorway, turning to glance at my phone still lying on the bed.

My eyes fell to the carpet as I waged an internal battle with myself over chelling it one more time for a message from Chloe. With a deep sigh, I cleared the small distance and picked it up, pressing the screen to view the status.

No messages.

My jaw clenched and my stomach tightened, whether with hurt or anger, I wasn’t sure. I knew she needed time, but how could she just ignore me? Tossing the phone to the bed with a bit more force than necessary, I turned quickly, swearing under my breath as I returned to the living room.

I managed a smile as Rachel’s gaze met mine, and if she noticed the sudden

change in my mood, she didn't mention it. We spoke of mutual acquaintances I'd left behind as we made our way to the elevator, and I let her contented presence calm me slightly. As the doors opened, I motioned for her to lead the way and pressed the button to take us downstairs.

"Oh," she began, bending at the waist to retrieve something from the floor next to her. "It looks like someone dropped their glasses."

I moved toward her, my eyes locked on the familiar frames she held in her hands.

"Those look almost like…" I paused as I took them from her, my expression pensive as I considered the possibility. I turned them over in my hand, running my thumb along the engraved logo I knew I'd seen countless times. My pulse quickened and my mind raced as I continued to inspect them. There was no way these could be Chloe's… *could they?* Wouldn't I have seen them on the way up? I thought of everything that had happened today. Was there even a possibility that she had come to my building? Could she have decided to give me another chance?

"Bennett?"

"Oh, God," I breathed, not realizing I'd moved until the cool metal of the interior wall seeped through my shirt. I reached out a hand to steady myself, my stomach rolling and all air evacuating my lungs as I watched the scene beginning to form in my head.

Chloe coming to see me.

Chloe seeing Rachel and I together.

Chloe leaving in such a rush that she didn't realize she'd dropped her glasses.

No.

I looked up as the series of chimes echoed throughout the small space, the illuminated numbers counting down to signal we'd reached the lobby.

I had to find her.

I straightened and stepped away from the wall, every reason for my being here now forgotten. Rachel moved to stand behind me, placing her hand gently on my shoulder.

"I won't lose her," I began, speaking to no one in particular . The elevator doors opened and I moved forward, stopping as someone blocked my path. I glanced up, ready to issue a quick 'excuse me', and froze.

"Chloe?" I asked in disbelief, positive that the woman standing in front of me

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had to be a figment of my exhausted mind. She turned toward my voice, her breath audibly catching in her throat as her wide eyes met mine. Time seemed to stop as we faced each other, everything focused on the woman standing in front of me.

“Bennett,” she breathed, her anxious fidgeting now forgotten. The voices around us seemed to quiet as I took in her tired face. She bit her lip and looked down briefly. My stomach clenched painfully as her red eyes met mine again.

“What are you…” I trailed off, trying to make sense of what was happening.

She came to me.

A throat cleared behind me, my mind barely registering that we weren’t alone.

“Bennett?” Rachel questioned, moving to stand beside me. I knew she was waiting for a response but I couldn’t take my eyes off Chloe…couldn’t wrap my mind around the fact that she had come to find me.

She wasn’t running.

“Bennett?” Rachel said again softly. “I think I’ll excuse myself.” I looked at her in a daze and she smiled. “Call me when you can.”

I nodded and watched her approach Chloe, unsure of what she was doing. Chloe never wavered as Rachel took her hands, pausing to glance back at me over her shoulder.

“I think,” Rachel began in French, turning toward Chloe again with a smile. “He’s definitely found his heart.”

Chloe only blinked in response, her forehead creased in frustration, having no idea what Rachel had said.

With one last genuine smile, Rachel left us both in front of the elevator. As she walked away, moving farther with each step, I realized that she took nothing with her. For the first time in over a year, I was truly free.

I looked down, my eyes falling to the glasses I still held in my hand.

“Are these yours?” I asked softly.

Chloe’s eyes narrowed as they fell to the frames I offered her, then widened in recognition.

“I didn’t realize I’d dropped them,” she whispered, taking them from me.

I nodded in acknowledgement, her simple statement confirming my suspicions. I shifted slightly, shoving my hands in my pockets to refrain from reaching for her.

“You were here then….earlier?”

“Yes,” she stated, her voice barely audible. My chest constricted as my arms ached to hold her. Here she stood, unsure of what had happened and yet somehow, she had enough faith in me to come back.

I would never deserve her.

I exhaled and moved forward, cautiously taking her hands in mine. She raised her chin to meet my eyes, and I smiled at the determination I saw there.

“Come with me?” I asked, my thumbs tracing soft circles across her palMs. She nodded and I gave her hands a gentle squeeze before turning toward the elevator, pressing the button to take us to my floor.

We stood together in silence, her arm pressed close enough to mine that I could feel the heat through my shirt. I refused to let go of her hand, and although she didn’t protest, it rested passively in my palm. The doors opened and I stepped out, leading her down the hall toward my apartment. I motioned for her to step in before me and closed the door silently, pausing before turning to face her.

My mind raced with the hundreds of things I needed to say to her, knowing that none of them would make up for what she’d probably felt tonight.

Standing in front of the window, she waited, certainly contemplating what she was doing here.

“Chloe,” I began, exhaling heavily, my sigh the only sound in the room.

“I went to the office,” she said softly. “Tonight… after I left.”

My eyes narrowed in confusion, wondering why she started there and wishing I could see her face. I moved to turn on the small lamp on the sofa table before she stopped me.

“No, don’t,” she protested. “I just…I like it like this. When the lights are on, I can’t see the city.”

My heart lurched at even that small similarity between us. I nodded, even though I knew she couldn’t see me, and moved to sit on the arm of the couch nearest to where she stood. From where I sat, I could see her profile; the way she chewed on her lip, the way she anxiously played with a curl that lay over her shoulder.

“You went to the office?” I asked, my stomach clenching uncomfortably, my breathing increasing slightly. There was only one reason she would have gone there after seeing Rachel and I together.

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She nodded, continuing to stare at the beautiful city skyline on the other side of the glass.

“You were quitting,” I stated, swallowing as a wave of nausea overtook me. I leaned forward, putting my hands on my knees as I tried to calm the overwhelming dread that filled every cell of my body. I knew it was now or never. If I wasn’t honest with her now, I’d have no one to blame but myself.

“Chloe…please…please don’t leave me.” My voice cracked, my body trembling as the image of her leaving played over and over in my mind. “Let me tell you everything, please. Please, Chloe. I love you so much…I’ll do anything.”

She turned to me, the city lights reflecting in the tears that pooled in her eyes. “I’m not leaving,” she began, a tremor visibly shaking her body. “I couldn’t… even if I wanted to.”

I exhaled in a rush as relief flooded me.

“What you saw…” I trailed off, shaking my head as I imagined it through her eyes. “Chloe, I’m sure you know that was Rachel. She came to tell me she’s getting married, that she forgives me for what I put her through. Baby, I know how it must have looked, but you have to know that I love you…that I could never….you’re everything to me. My life is yours, everything I have… everything I am, it’s yours.”

I watched as a tear slipped down her cheek, the trail glistening in the dim light.

“I know…” she said quietly, our gazes meeting in the dark. I ached to hold her, to wipe away her tears.

My arms shook as I clenched my fists, my nails digging into my palMs. “I started packing my things,” she murmured and I shook my head, trying to dispel the image of going in and finding her desk empty.

“Your father was there. He surprised me while I was cleaning out my desk.” She hesitated, her eyes moving briefly to the window again. “We talked.”

“My dad was there?”

“Yeah,” she breathed, wrapping her arms around herself.

“What did he say?” I asked, unable to keep the tremor from my voice.

“That he loved me like his own daughter,” her voice cracked as more tears fell. I was so grateful in that moment to my father, knowing how much she cared for my parents, how hurt she was to have disappointed them both. She inhaled a

shaky breath and continued. “And he basically told me what I already knew, that you’re different now, that you’ve changed.”

“I have, Chloe.”

“He said that you’ve always acted as if the weight of the world was on your shoulders…but they’ve seen a change, and they know now that the change was me.”

Our eyes met and for the first time since I’d touched her all those months ago, I saw no doubt there.

“It’s true.”

“I saw something and overreacted. I’m so sorry that I let my fear and insecurity override what I know about you…about the man you’ve proven to be. But I’m not scared anymore, Bennett. I think…for us to move on, I needed to realize it for myself. I *know* you love me,” she stated firmly as her arms fell loosely to her sides, her voice unwavering.

“So much,” I breathed, needing to hold her, to reassure myself that she was really here. As if sensing my struggle, she moved forward, stopping to stand in front of me. I reached out and took her hands, my thumb brushing over the bracelet that still lay there. She stepped between my legs and I pulled her to me, pressing my face against her stomach, closing my eyes as her hands wound through my hair.

“I love you, Bennett.” She kissed the top of my head, sighing as I tightened my grasp.

“You came back,” I whispered into her shirt, realizing the enormity of what she’d done.

“I’m done running from you.”

I pulled back to look at her, my eyes searching her face. Despite everything, she’d let her belief in me override her fear. Running my hand up her body, the backs of my fingers swept across her damp cheek.

“Thank you,” I whispered, smiling as she leaned into my touch. “Chloe, we have so much to talk about.”

“We do,” she answered quietly. I felt her cheek lift under my palm as she smiled. “And I’m not going anywhere.”

I smiled in return and pulled her down to me, my lips brushing lightly across hers. “I love you,” I murmured against her mouth.

She sighed heavily, a mixture of contentment and relief evident in the sound.

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The clock in the hallway chimed, ringing through the darkness. Pulling back, I ran my thumb under her eye again, brushing away what I hoped would be the last of her tears tonight.

“It’s late,” I said, noting the way her body leaned into mine and thinking back on the all that had transpired in the last twenty-four hours.

She nodded, laughing quietly. “I’m so tired.”

“Come on.” I stood and picked her up, carrying her into my room.

We undressed each other quietly. I kissed her chin, her ear, her navel. She whispered ‘I love you’ against my shoulder and kissed my lips softly. There was no frenzy, only the need to be close. We climbed into bed together, my own exhaustion suddenly overwhelming me as I covered us with the thick comforter. Her body molded to mine, our legs intertwining as I wrapped my arms around her.

The last thing I heard before I drifted off to sleep was the contented sigh of the woman I knew I’d never let go of again.

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I awoke some time later. The room was still dark, her soft, warm body slumbering beneath me.

Lifting my chin, I watched her. I was mesmerized by the way her breasts lifted with each breath, the way her hair fanned out across my pillow, and how her tongue darted out to moisten her lips. At the forefront of my mind was still the fact that she had returned to me. Despite everything that she had seen, she believed in me enough to come back. Second to this was the knowledge that we no longer needed to hide. I could take her out, kiss her in front of my family, and tell the world that she was mine.

I was suddenly ravenous with need to touch her.

I placed a kiss against her breast, her familiar and delicate scent washing over me. I circled my tongue around her nipple, taking it into my mouth, unable to keep from groaning at the feel of her under my lips. As I sucked gently, she moaned, her hands moving to my head and holding it to her.

“Bennett,” she sighed, and the need in her voice went straight to my cock. Moving to her other nipple, I took it between my teeth and tugged gently. She gasped, arching her back, her hips moving against mine.

“I’m sorry to wake you,” I murmured against her skin, kissing a trail up to her neck. “But I couldn’t lay here with you for one more second and not touch you.”

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“Mmm, I’m glad,” she sighed, her legs shifting as I settled between them. Her pulse beat rapidly beneath my lips, her heat causing me to moan as I brushed against her.

“I love you so much,” I whispered into her ear. I can’t wait to tell everyone that you’re mine.” Kissing along her jaw, I pushed my hands into her hair, bringing her lips to mine.

“No more hiding,” she breathed into my mouth.

“Never.”

Our lips moved together, her tongue tangling with mine as the kiss deepened. Trembling fingers traced my jaw, my stubble-covered chin audibly rough against her soft skin. I pulled at her bottom lip, taking it between mine and sucking. My hand moved along her naked body, down her side and to her hip. I rocked against her, groaning into her mouth as I felt her wetness coat me. My fingers continued down her leg and I reached behind her knee, hitching it onto my arm to bring her leg near her chest.

She moaned loudly as I moved my hips, the new position aligning me perfectly along her clit. Each movement brought a new and more wanton sound from her lips.

“That feels so good,” she moaned as I rocked against her. “Don’t…don’t stop.”

I shook my head as I tasted her skin, my mouth moving from her lips to her jaw. I trailed kisses down her neck and along her shoulders, a brief glimpse of being with her every night, in *our* bed, ghosting through my mind. Her hands roamed my back, her fingertips exploring each muscle as it flexed and contracted. Closing my eyes, I focused on the feeling of sliding against her this way, the smoothness and the heat of her consuming me as I continued to move. It was the sweetest torture to know that with the slightest change in angle, I could be inside her body.

Slipping her hand between us, she grasped my cock. I held my body off her as I watched her place the head against herself, slowly circling her entrance.

“Oh fuck, baby,” I hissed. My chest heaved and my body strained with the effort of not moving, of letting her control this. Warmth engulfed me as she pulled me forward, and we watched as the tip of my cock slipped inside of her.

“Oh, Bennett,” she gasped, her eyes fluttering closed as her muscles constricted slightly around me.

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“Please, Chloe,” I begged, the urge to thrust, to sheath myself inside of her body almost too strong to resist. Moving her hands to my hips, she gripped me tightly, urging me forward. Inch by inch, I moved deeper until my hips were flush with hers. Her head fell back against the pillow and with shaking hands, she pulled my face to hers.

“Wait,” she murmured against my lips when I shifted slightly. “I just need to feel you.”

“I know, baby.” I kissed her slowly, slipping my arms beneath her and pulling her to me. “Tell me you love me,” I whispered, trailing kisses along her chin and jaw.

“I love you.” I felt her words vibrate beneath my lips and I smiled against her throat. “Move in me, Bennett.”

Pulling back slightly, I groaned, my eyes rolling to the back of my head as I thrust back inside her. Her hips lifted, her breathy moans and sighs spurring me on. Her legs wrapped around my waist as I rocked against her. Her hands tangled in my hair roughly, her back arching as I took her nipple between my teeth.

Rolling us over, she hovered above me, her hair brushing along my chest and shoulders as we moved.

My hands explored her as we kissed, leaving a trail of goosebumps along her skin. I bent my legs and thrust up to meet her, my palms skimming along her thighs, cupping her, pulling her onto me. She pushed off my chest, sitting up, her legs on either side of my hips.

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“You look so beautiful,” I said, my eyes greedily roaming her body.

“So do you,” she teased, breathlessly. Her palms came to rest on my chest, supporting her as she rocked on top of me. Cupping her gently, my thumb moved in circles around her hardened nipple. She moaned and covered my hand, her fingers entwining with mine, encouraging me to grip her more firmly. Her head fell back and I sat up, brushing kisses along her throat, feeling each whimper as it escaped her. I placed a hand behind her head, the other moving between her breasts to rest at her waist. She leaned back, arching, offering herself to me as her hair swept along my legs with each movement.

Leaning over, I kissed her breasts, my tongue flicking her nipple before taking it between my lips.

“You taste so good,” I said hungrily. She cried out as I dragged my teeth along the tender flesh, teasing it before kissing it gently and moving to the other.

“Harder, Bennett,” she groaned, her hips moving against mine. I lay her on her back and moved to hover over her again, kissing along her leg as I placed it over my shoulder. Her body rocked back up to meet mine as I began to thrust. She gripped the sheets near her head, the fabric straining, bunching under her fingers.

“Like that?” I asked, rocking more forcefully against her, noting the sheen of sweat along her chest and shoulders.

“God yes,” she panted. “Right there, oh please….right there.”

“I’m so close, baby,” I swallowed roughly, my mouth dry as the muscles in my stomach began to clench. “I can feel you…I can feel you coming. *Oh God*.”

She called my name loudly, her back arching into me, her hands reaching for the foot board. Her hips lifted off the mattress and I gripped them tightly, attempting to still her as I thrust one final time, coming inside of her.

As our bodies slowed, our chests heaving against each other, our eyes met. I leaned forward and kissed her gently, laughing softly at the feel of her racing heart pounding in time with my own.

With an exhausted sigh, I rolled us over again, my outstretched arms falling limply beside my head.

She pressed her face into my neck as I tried to catch my breath.

” *Jesus Christ*,” I panted, running my hand through my hair and across my face. Propping her chin on my chest, she smiled widely at me, her hair a tangled mess and her skin almost glowing in the dawning light. She looked to the window before turning back to me.

“Well, good morning, handsome,” she giggled softly as I brushed the hair off her damp forehead.

“Mmm…It was a *very* good morning,” I teased, winking as I pulled her further up my body. I placed a kiss against her lips before tilting my head, my tone becoming more serious. “Can I tell you something?” I asked, tracing my thumb along her flushed cheeks.

Her eyes closed and she sighed contentedly as I ran my fingers through her wild hair.

“This is exactly how I want to wake up every morning.” Her eyes opened to meet mine. “Chloe, you are the love of my life, there will never be anyone else for me. *Ever*.” Taking her face in my hands, I continued. “I knew *every* day I was with Rachel that she wasn’t meant for me, and I’ve known every day since we met that you *were*.”

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“You did?” she asked, her voice shaking slightly.

I sighed deeply, my eyes falling briefly before returning to hers. “I stayed with Rachel for all the wrong reasons. Our relationship was comfortable, safe and easy. I stayed with her because everyone expected me to, despite knowing that I would *never* return her depth of feeling. Rachel is a beautiful, giving woman and when she wanted more…when she wanted what most people want, what she had every *right* to expect…I left.”

I swallowed, my eyes moving to the piece of her hair I twisted distractedly around my finger. “She wanted marriage and kids and I panicked. I panicked because I didn’t want those things, not with her.

I told her I didn’t love her anymore, that she deserved someone who would give her everything without question. I was gone by the end of the night.”

“And now?” she asked quietly.

“And now,” I sighed, tilting my head and meeting her gaze once again. “I see that I should have ended it long before then. I led her on because it was easy. We never argued, and I thought we wanted the same things. She lost herself in us. I hurt her so badly when I left, she stopped working, she closed herself off…she fell apart. And I-“

“Came here,” she finished in a hushed whisper.

I nodded, trying to read her expression. “That first time I saw you, standing in my office laughing… Chloe, I felt in that *one moment* what I’d never felt the entire time Rachel and I were together.”

Her breath seemed to catch in her throat as she waited for me to continue.

“I was terrified. I couldn’t stop thinking about you, no matter what I did or how I acted…you were always there. I thought maybe if you hated me and I could *force* myself to hate you, that it would be fine.” A single tear slipped down her cheek and I brushed it away. “But it was no use,” I said softly, shaking my head. “You were the sexiest thing I’d ever seen: argumentative, strong willed, opinionated, smart. I was the biggest jackass to you, and you never let me get away with it.”

I smiled as I brushed the backs of my fingers along her jaw.

“I was tormented with wanting you, Chloe. The office had turned into my personal hell on earth…but there was no way I could have left. Is this making any sense?”

“Yes,” she said, leaning into my hand. “I could never understand what I did,

why you disliked me so much."

"You didn't *do* anything," I answered, leaning up to brush a soft kiss against her lips. My fingers moved up and down her arm as I tried to explain. "I'd convinced myself that things were manageable, and then that first night happened. You were so close, and I could smell you and *feel* you in the air. All I had to do was reach out and… *take*. When you didn't push me away, when you let me touch you…feel you…be inside of you…" I trailed off, pulling her face to mine, my lips sweeping back and forth. "I was lost. It became so much more than wanting your body. I wanted *you*."

"I've always wanted you," she whispered, our mouths so close, I felt each word as she spoke it.

"You have me, you always have," I answered, my eyes open and searching her face. "And I'm never letting you go again."

Her fingers twisted roughly in my hair, and she pulled me to her, her mouth pressing eagerly against mine. "Show me," she breathed, her grip tightening against my scalp. "Show me what you didn't all that time." She ran her tongue along my jaw and lowered her voice. "Show me what you wanted."

I groaned as her words shot through me and rolled us onto our sides, the length of our bodies pressed against each other. "I wanted you to touch me and show me how well you knew my body," I told her, trembling as her hand wrapped around me, her thumb circling the tip. "I wanted to know that you noticed every detail, too."

"Like this?" she asked, her palm sliding up and down my length.

"God, yes," I hissed, my hips rocking against her as she continued to tease me. Her hand moved slowly, her touch so familiar, so devastatingly perfect.

"What else?" She placed a kiss at the corner of my mouth, before running her lips along my jaw.

"I wanted to touch you," I answered. "I wanted you to feel in my touch that I felt every reaction, that I saw everything you liked me to do."

I felt her take one of my hands and place it on her breast. "Like this?" Her voice was a low purr: teasing, knowing.

I knew exactly what she wanted: first, my palm on her, feeling the weight of her in my hand. Next, fingers sliding back to a soft pinch. Finally, a slight tug. She moaned, like I knew she would.

"Yes," I sighed against her, lost in the feeling of touching her body, knowing

no one else would ever know her this way, no one else would ever make her feel this.

"What else?" Her words were strained and tight with need.

"I wanted you to say my name." I pinched her slightly as I leaned to kiss her.

I felt her smile against my lips. "I love how you make me feel, *Bennett*," she growled into my ear.

"I wanted to say *your* name." I nibbled her bottom lip. She panted against me as I murmured, "I wanted to call you Chloe." I lifted her leg and placed it on my hip, my hands moving to her ass, pulling her more firmly to me.

I pulled my head back and looked at her, wanting to acknowledge when everything changed for us.

"And after Seattle, I wanted to just *be* together without having to pretend we were so angry all the time, to not resent how weak I felt. I wanted you to be happy to see me so I could show you how my chest felt like it was cracked open when I saw your smile. I wanted you to love me." I rolled her over, and moved between her legs. "I wanted you to love me the way that I loved you."

"I *do* love you," she breathed against my neck, her lips running along my throat, her legs wrapping around my waist. "Bennett, please…"

Pushing forward, I shuddered as I slipped inside of her again. I turned my head, seeking her lips to find her waiting for me. Taking her hands in mine, I raised them above her head, pressing them against the mattress. I held her captive there, the way she'd always held me.

"I love you, Chloe," I breathed, my body continuing to rock into hers. "I want to make you mine," I said between kisses. "I want to wake up with you every morning, and I want to fall asleep with you in my arms every night." She panted softly underneath me and I pulled away slightly, pressing my lips against her flushed cheek and moving to whisper in her ear. "I want to watch my baby grow inside of you."

Her grip tightened on my hands in response, her legs pulling me closer as she softly cried out my name. I felt her body arch against mine as I began to thrust inside of her, completely lost in her arms.

"I want those things too," she murmured against my lips. A moment of clarity broke through my fractured thoughts. I saw us as the couple we were together, not the stubborn, lost people we had been separately. I knew without a doubt that I belonged to her and that she would always be mine as well. I understood her

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fears and knew that she had put it all aside to believe in us.

The sun had risen, the soft rays of morning light filtered in through the windows, falling across the bed to glisten in her hair. My hand still entwined with hers, I brought it to my mouth, placing the softest kiss against her ring finger. I knew without a shadow of a doubt that I would put a ring there.

That knowledge overwhelmed me.

As I looked down at her, her eyes opened. She bit her lip before taking my face into her hands and kissing me with the same frantic hunger I felt.

“I can’t hold out much longer,” she whispered against my lips, bringing me back as the familiar rush began to spread throughout my body. “Please come with me…” I kissed her slowly as she tensed around me, our interlocked hands pressed against our bodies, our hearts both thundering between us.

We came together in a wave of soft sighs and shaky breaths, our limbs trembling with exhaustion as we wrapped ourselves around each other. She brushed the hair off my forehead and placed a kiss there before I moved to rest my head against her chest.

“Do you know what I want to do?” I asked through heaving breaths, the thump of her heart just below my ear.

“What?” she answered, my eyes closing as her fingers ran through my hair.

“Take you to breakfast,” I answered simply. She laughed softly and I smiled, hearing the sound that had become so precious to me.

“Now why would you want to do that?” she asked. “Everything I want is right here in this bed.”

I looked up at her then and smiled. “Because I want to take you to the most crowded street in all of Chicago,” I began, bringing her fingers to my mouth and brushing my lips against them once more.

“And I want to hold your hand.”

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Epilogue

Its taken nine months of my life to bring these characters to this point and my heart breaks to let them go. I have no words to adequately explain what being a part of this community has meant to me, to see women lift each other up, celebrate our differences and band together to make the world a better place has truly been miraculous to witness. To each person who read and fell in love with BB, I thank you. To each person who ever had a kind word to say, your words did matter. To my friends, the people who supported me and held my hand along the way, I can never thank you enough. To my Moi, Nina, Lo, Alice, tara, kathy, Tif, and everyone else I'm forgetting, you are loved. Rachel, you've suffered through my horrid sentence structure, my long chapters and nervous breakdowns-thank you will never be enough.

Lastly, to my Dawnie. You were the one who showed me I could put the pictures in my head on paper, you held my hand, loved me and pushed me out of the nest when it was time. We did this together and I love you.

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He sighed contentedly, his head falling back,

Rolling lazily against my shoulder. I watched him

Stretch his long legs out, bringing them to rest on the edge of the porcelain tub. Water dripped from his hair, each drop landing rhythmically against my breast before trickling down to the waterline. The vanilla scented steam swirled around us, the sounds of the lively Paris street floating in from the open window.

I pressed my lips against his temple and closed my eyes, feeling at peace.

"You do know we're both going to catch pneumonia, don't you?" he said teasingly, his tone causing me to smile.

"Hmmm," I sighed, my grin widening. "I'm not sure I care at the moment."

He laughed quietly, the deep vibrations tickled through my chest. "You may care when you're too sick to enjoy our vacation," he replied, leaning his head back to peer at me.

I looked down at him, unable to resist a kiss with his mouth so close.

"It sounds *so* beautiful," I sighed, my eyes drifting over to the view of the Eiffel Tower illuminated in the darkening sky. The night sky here wasn't full of stars, but the sights of the city. Not that I had seen much of it; since our arrival,
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we found it difficult to leave the room. I wasn't complaining, I'd enjoyed every minute of my time here with him. The faint sound of laughter, of tinkling wine glasses and the string of a violin below carried up to us from the café several floors beneath our penthouse. " *But*… you may have a point."

I kissed him once more before he moved to the edge abruptly, reaching up to close the ornate latch on the large window.

I watched, riveted by the way his arms stretched, mesmerized by the play of muscles as his back flexed and contracted. The water sloshed around us as he turned to find me staring, the corner of his mouth lifting, deep laughter echoing in the elaborately tiled bathroom.

He shook his head and leaned in, kissing my lips softly before resuming his seat between my legs. "I want your undivided attention."

"Trust me, you have it," I assured.

"Are you sure you don't want to switch places?" he asked again, his hands curling around my calves, his fingers slowly kneading the muscle.

"Mmmm," I moaned at the feeling, my eyes rolling back. "No way, I'm perfectly content like this."

He laughed again. "I'm sure you are."

Wrapping my arms around his shoulders, I pulled him to me, kissing the side of his neck before running my fingers through his hair. "Comfortable?"

"Very." He tilted his head and sighed, his warm breath tickling my wet skin. "But, is this all I get to show you of Paris?"

"What are you talking about? We've seen tons," I reassured him, thinking of all he had shared with me. My fingers brushed along his chest, the course hair and hard muscle so familiar under my hands.

"Yes," he began. "And yet, nights here are beautiful, and we always seem to end up *here*." He laughed, motioning to the tub.

"Or the bed," I teased, my teeth scraping along his neck. "Or the chair, or-"

" *Baby*," he groaned, and I smiled, noticing the trail of goosebumps down hisarms. "I know, I know. Just a few more minutes."

He nodded, turning to kiss my chin. "If you keep that up we'll never get out… just like yesterday."

Meeting his eyes, I laughed, tightening my grip around him and resting my face against his neck.

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“I think I want a tub just like this in the new house.”

“I think that’s a great idea, baby,” he began, running his fingers along my arm. “Although… I have no idea how we’ll get anything done.”

I laughed, sighing against his shoulder. “Our house,” I repeated, the barely contained joy I had each time we discussed this threatening to erupt. I smiled widely and bit my lip, so giddy I could burst.

Our eyes met again, his warm, wet hand gently cupping my cheek, his smile as wide as mine.

” *Our house.* “

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Two hours later, I sat on the bed, finishing up my telephone conversation with his mother.

“Isn’t Paris the most beautiful place you’ve ever been?” she asked, the wonder and dream-like quality of her voice not going unnoticed. “I lived for the times we got to visit.”

“It’s been amazing,” I agreed. “We’ve gone all the places I just had to see – the Louvre, the Champs-Elysees, of course the Eiffel Tower. But he’s also shown me vineyards, even his old apartment.

Visiting with someone who actually speaks French has been…” I trailed off, remembering my reaction to him simply ordering dinner for us.

“Oh trust me,” she began mischievously. “I know *exactly* what you mean.”

My free hand came up to cover my eyes, shaking my head with a small laugh. “Oh my God.”

She laughed, too, continuing our discussion, relaying to me her most recent trip here. The ease of our conversation reminded me of how much closer we had become. In these moments, I caught myself wondering if any of this was real; so much had changed in the last few months.

Despite protests from his family, I’d never taken the position with the new CEO. I opted instead to return to school and volunteering at the treatment center my mom had visited. The money she left me proved to be a Godsend, and despite my doting boyfriend’s constant offers of support, I managed to do quite well on my own. With one exception, however. After doing a grand total on the amount of lingerie he had ruined, I finally accepted his La Perla account.

It was something on which we were *both* happy to compromise.
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But despite all that had happened and the effect our choices had on my career, being with the love of my life had changed me in ways I'd never imagined, and for the first time ever, I no longer felt the need to prove myself to anyone. I had the love and respect of the man of my dreams. The rest was simply details.

There wasn't one moment that I mourned giving up a job that had once defined my identity. I knew there were even greater opportunities awaiting me in the future, but for the time being, I was enjoying a happiness I had never known. I wasn't alone in feeling this way; I saw the change in him, and so did his family.

I would never forget his father's words to me.

"My son can be a difficult man," he'd said, his eyes far away. "But these last few weeks, he's been different. He smiles more, he jokes with his family. . he doesn't seem to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders. I know now, that change was you. Regardless of how it came about, we're so thankful for that."

Those were the words I carried with me, making my decisions easier than I'd ever imagined possible.

His father was right, of course, but he had also changed the way that I saw the world and my place in it.

"Are you dining out tonight?" Her inquisitive tone pulled me back to the present.

"I'm sorry, what was that?"

She laughed knowingly. "What are you two planning for tonight?"

"Oh," I said, shaking my head at my absentmindedness. "We're actually going to the opera."

"What are you seeing?" she perked up.

The sound of the shower door opening caught my attention. Leaning back against the headboard, I caught flashes of his skin reflected in the mirror.

The door was slightly ajar, the delicate gold leaf sconces illuminating his nearly naked, wet body. His towel hung low on his hips as he leaned against the counter, the razor moving with expert precision along his angled jaw and chin. As much as I was enjoying this chat, I wanted to join him.

"We're seeing La Boheme," I answered distractedly as he moved in and out of my view. "And he has some secret place he's very intent on taking me this week."

"Well," she teased. "I'm sure I have absolutely no idea where that could be." I rolled my eyes, knowing everyone was obviously keeping something from me,

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but became distracted once again as he disappeared behind the door.

“I’m excited,” I recovered, thinking quickly. “Speaking of… I need to finish getting ready. Do you want me to have him call you when he’s free?” I asked, more eager now.

“Just give him my love and you two enjoy yourselves,” she answered. “I love you both, kiss my son for me.” I smiled at the affection in her voice.

“I will. We love you too.”

Hanging up and tossing the phone to the chair, I made my way to the bathroom. Peeking around the door, my breath caught, the edge of his tattoo visible above the towel.

“Knock, knock,” I said, meeting his gaze in the mirror.

As I entered, he stopped, setting down the razor and turning toward me, his eyes moving hungrily over me in return. “Baby, you look absolutely beautiful.”

“Thank you,” I mumbled, unable to take my eyes off him. “You, um… aren’t half bad yourself.”

He laughed as he cleared the distance between us, pausing to run his finger along the deep neckline of my floor length gown. I placed my hands against his chest, silently relishing the way his heart raced beneath my palms

“Yet again… I’m not sure I want to leave this room now,” he whispered into my hair. I closed my eyes as his warm breath swept over me, my senses focused on the path of his hands. Lightly, his fingers traveled across my shoulders and along my neck, stopping as they tangled in my hair. I loved the way he touched me, and if he kept it up, I wasn’t sure I would want to leave either.

I swallowed loudly, certain he could hear it, positive that he knew my every reaction to him.

Time had not lessened his physical hold on me, if anything, it had only intensified. I was no more able to resist him now than I had been that first night. As I lifted my chin to meet his eyes, I knew that he was every bit as powerless as I was.

He leaned in slowly, his eyes half closed and focused on my mouth, tracing my bottom lip with his thumb.

“I can’t imagine being anywhere else. Thank you for coming with me,” he said softly, his nose nudging against mine.

“Thank you for asking me,” I answered breathlessly.

“Thank you for loving me.” His lips hovered just out of reach, his hold on me tightening.

“Thank you for wanting me to.”

He smiled against my lips for the briefest second before his eyes fell closed. Tilting my head, he pulled me to him, moaning softly as he closed the remaining distance between us. Every nerve in my body ignited the moment his lips fully covered mine.

He smelled of shampoo and shaving cream, his skin still warm and slightly damp from his shower. My hands slipped down his chest, my fingers brushing along the edge of the towel, itching to remove it, to feel him in my hand. He lingered against my lips, teasing me but never deepening the kiss. I whimpered as he pulled away, his forehead pressed against mine.

“We need to go,” he complained, his breaths labored as he pressed a kiss to my hair.

“I know.” My hands continued to move greedily along his skin, tracing the muscles of his shoulders.

Moving back, he took my face in his palMs. “Do you know what I’m going to do?” he asked, his mischievous grin causing my pulse to quicken.

“I’m going to take you out tonight and show you off in that dress.”

He placed a single kiss against my cheek. “Knowing that every man is watching you, and that you belong to me.” His lips lingered at the corner of my mouth.

“And when I get you back here,” his voice deepened as his eyes fell to my lips again. “I’m going to make love to you.” He kissed my lips gently. “Until the sun comes up.”

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Bennett’s POV

Two days later

We walked hand-in-hand along the narrow, cobbled streets, enjoying the starless evening. The sidewalks were still wet from the recent storm, the air thick with the scent of rain. Our pace was leisurely, each of us lost in our own thoughts as we strolled along the busy lane. There was nothing awkward about our silence, no uncomfortable lull in the conversation; just the complete contentment of being together.

We rounded a familiar corner and I felt the stirrings of anxiety. I focused
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instead on where we were and what this night meant, letting her closeness calm me as we neared the cafe.

Beautiful displays with twinkling lights and holiday decorations filled the tiny shop windows, each seeming to glow from within. I inhaled deeply, my lungs filling with the familiar scents of wet stone, coffee, and cinnamon from the bakery two shops down. I began to wonder how I'd allowed myself to stay away for so long, how I'd managed to never return to the place that had become such a part of me. As my thoughts drifted back to the woman beside me however, I knew.

I was meant to find her first.

I turned my head to watch her then, smiling widely at her fascinated expression. She was enjoying the city, enjoying just walking with me, soaking it all in just as I had on my first trip. I'd had high hopes for our time here together, but was in no way prepared for how her happiness would affect me. Her eyes would light up as we walked the streets, taking in the small boutiques, the easy sidewalk cafes, the markets with colorful produce out front. I saw the city through her eyes, taking it all in – its differences, its eccentricities – through her wide, excited gaze."

Her joy became my joy, one more lesson that being truly in love had taught me.

I shook my head in wonder, letting my eyes fall to our joined hands swinging silently between us, my heart swelling at the simple gesture and all that it meant to me.

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She sighed, drawing my attention back up to her face. Her nose and cheeks were red now, her hair falling in waves around her shoulders. Early snowflakes glittered like diamonds in her eyelashes as puffs of air floated up with each exhalation. The cool December evening was chilly enough to force us into coats and gloves, encouraging us both to consider staying in again. But nothing in this world could have kept me from my plans tonight.

Without another thought, I pulled her to me, wrapping my arms around her shoulders as I continued to guide us towards our destination. She returned the gesture, placing her arms around my waist and letting her head rest briefly against my chest.

"What was that for?" she asked as I released my grip, lifting her chin to peer up at me.

"Because you're here," I answered, kissing her head and smiling down at her.

She sighed happily, leaning into me as we walked, the sounds of fellow shoppers and Christmas carols adding to our cheerful mood. We were getting closer; one more corner and we'd be there.

My mind drifted to the items stored safely in my coat pocket, and to what her reaction would inevitably be to them. I'd known for months that I wanted her to be my wife, but I'd held off, always worried it was too soon.

Shortly after our relationship became public, I'd suggested moving in together, certain there was no way we could spend another night apart. I'd been surprised when she'd turned me down, wondering if I'd misjudged things, if the possibility existed that we wanted different futures.

Lying side by side on my couch, my hands running though her hair in the darkened room, we'd talked that night. *Really* talked.

She told me of her fears: that I'd only been interested in one type of relationship with her, that she'd loved me since Seattle and had spent every day since then preparing to lose me. She told me of the moment she decided to stop fighting it and how each day she loved me more. We talked more about her fear of disappointing my family, how grateful she'd been for their love and acceptance, and how she'd wished her mother was still alive to know me.

She'd calmed my fears so easily; her words soothing my damaged ego, helping me realize we both needed time to adjust.

Since that night, I'd never pushed, promising myself I would give her the time she needed; that *we* needed. Despite our plans, we'd hardly spent a night apart.

Things hadn't always been perfect, of course. She'd decided not to stay at the firm, a decision I had struggled with. But as she'd predicted, there were people who talked about our relationship and I knew she often tried to hide it from me. I'd felt guilt that she'd given up a job she loved, worrying she would resent me for it in the end.

There were also days we argued. One of the things I loved so fiercely was her strong will. She was every bit as stubborn and independent as I was, a fact that often led to heated arguments, but she never let me get away with closing myself off and always called me on my bullshit. I loved her even more for it.

She'd grown so much in the time we'd been together, always reminding me that what we had was what mattered; the rest would work itself out in the end. I fell in love with her all over again during the time that followed, seeing her not only as the woman I couldn't resist, but the best friend I could never live without.

A few weeks ago, my father had approached me about a possible office in New York. My first reaction had been to turn him down, my thoughts instantly moving to her. There was no way I could make a decision this important without consulting her, but was terrified to bring it up. I knew I could never live without her, of that much I was certain. Would she feel the same? As the deadline approached, I'd mentioned it in passing. Her response both surprised and thrilled me.

She'd looked contemplative for only a moment before meeting my gaze, saying she was ready, and wanted *us* to go.

I knew it was time.

The next day I went shopping, and the moment I saw the ring now residing in my pocket, I'd known it was perfect for her. Somehow, I had managed to keep it hidden, all the while dreaming of the day that I would make her my wife.

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As we rounded the last corner and my cafe came into view, the intensity of my anticipation left me unable to form words.

"Is this it?" she'd asked excitedly, remembering the story I'd told her that changed my path in life, about the night I'd visited this very cafe all those years ago. I nodded as I opened the door for her, my head suddenly swimming as memories from my past met my hopes for the future. Everything culminating in this powerful moment literally taking my breath away.

Almost seven years ago, I'd sat in this same spot, frightened and full of doubt, knowing that my life stood at a crossroads. Knowing that the next move would shape the remainder of my life. I thought of the song that had played that night, *Je ne Regrette Rien*, and how the words had shaped the man I would be.

Sensing my mood, she eyed me curiously as I guided us to a table in the back. I was shocked by how little had changed. From the dim lighting to the round wrought iron tables, this place was the same, still arranged as it had been all those years ago.

I watched her eye the menu, biting back a chuckle as she frowned adorably, attempting to decipher the French. Maybe our lessons were paying off after all.

Glancing up, she met my gaze from across the small table, a look of concern etched across her features.

“Honey?”

Her hand came to rest on mine, squeezing gently, and I lifted my chin to meet her eyes. The same certainty resonated in my heart as it had that night. I moved to entwine my fingers with hers, he first time how entwined my life was with *her*, how I saw no future for myself that didn’t include her in it, as my partner, my best friend, my wife.

Looking into her eyes, seeing her concern, I let every doubt fall from my shoulders. Regardless of her answer tonight, she loved me.

Completely.

I ran my thumb along her ring finger and smiled, wanting to remember every second of this.

She leaned forward, her lips lingering against mine before brushing along my cheek.

“I love you,” she whispered, placing another kiss near my ear.

She gasped softly and perked up, looking beyond my shoulder. “It’s snowing.”

I turned briefly to watch the large flakes fall to the ground before returning my attention to her.

“It’s so beautiful,” she murmured, her face the picture of perfect happiness.

“It is.” I reached out, brushing the backs of my fingers along her cheek. “Je ne regrette rien,” I murmured to myself, my heart beginning to race over what was coming. The whole and utter truth of those words resonated within me. She turned and smiled knowingly, understanding the familiar phrase.

“You know…” I began, before she could speak. “That was always true before. Mistakes helped me grow. But I’ve come to understand that, of all the mistakes I’ve made in my life, the only one I regret is not letting myself love you sooner. That I pushed you away for so long.”

“I…” she started, but I continued.

“I never want to be without you, baby,” I began, my thumb running along her jaw. “I’m so grateful that you love me. I have so many flaws… made so many mistakes, and yet you love me despite them.”

She shook her head as she ran her hand through my hair. “I love *all* of you.”

Closing my eyes, I absorbed her words, feeling the truth of them wash over

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me. I kissed her hand before reaching into my pocket and placing the items on the table before her.

Her gaze followed mine and I watched as the moment of understanding completely captured her expression.

“Oh my God,” she gasped, her visibly trembling hands moving to her mouth, her eyes glistening with tears. “I don’t…”

On the table sat a tiny statue of the Eiffel Tower, her ring resting around it.

“I want to give you the world,” I said, moving to kneel in front of her. “This is just the first piece.”

I took her hands in mine, kissing the backs before looking into her eyes, watching the tears fall down her flushed cheeks.

“I’m not willing to let another second go by without telling you what you mean to me. It may have taken us awhile to get here but I want you in a way I won’t *ever* want anyone else.” I held the ring out to her. “Will you marry me?”

She nodded, unable to speak and I took her hand in mine, placing my ring onto her finger. I kissed it gently, my eyes closing as the magnitude of what this meant washed over me.

She said ‘yes’.

I moved closer to kneel between her legs. “I love you,” I whispered, wiping her tear streaked face with my thumbs. When she looked at me, her eyes so full of love and joy, a sense of fulfillment settled over me, but it was different. Stronger than I’d ever felt before. She gripped my shirt and pulled me to her, her lips crashing into mine.

“I love you, too,” she said breathlessly between kisses. “I love you more than I ever thought possible.”

I laughed through wet eyes as she pressed kisses along my face, her hands moving to fist in my hair.

The world around us disappeared as her lips found mine again. Voices faded into the background, the music floating around us a distant hum. My senses focused on the woman in my arms, the silky texture of her hair as it slipped through my fingers, the way she tasted, the sounds she made.

“Take me back to the hotel,” she murmured, her fingers tracing the shape of my jaw. I nodded, jumping up and tossing a few bills to the table before taking her hand to lead her out the door.

We practically ran the distance to our hotel as the snow fell around us,

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stopping several times as one of us pulled the other into a fevered kiss, promises of what was to come spoken in breathy whispers.

By the time we entered the elevator, I was ready to tear the clothes from her body, but I kept my patience. When the doors opened, I backed her down the hall, uncaring of who would see and loving that I no longer needed to. I fumbled with the key card as we reached our room, the door closed for only seconds before she pressed my body roughly against it.

“I need you,” she panted, her fingers moving frantically to unfasten my jacket, her lips moving in a

path down my neck.

“Here?” I asked, her coat already in a pile at her feet, her shirt practically ripped off and tossed to the chair next to us.

“Please,” she pleaded. My shirt soon followed hers and I shuddered as the cool wood of the door pressed against my back. The sound of my belt and zipper followed by the rustle of denim was loud in the silent room, but I had no time to focus as she pushed the jeans quickly down my hips. We both kicked our shoes off hastily and I smiled at the way I now towered above her.

I turned us, her back now against the door, my hands traveling down her legs to slip beneath her skirt. I groaned as I felt her stockings, my fingers tracing the lines of what I knew was the black garter belt she’d let me buy for her only days before.

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I continued to explore what lay hidden from my view, pausing as I reached something unexpected.

“Fuck, baby. Is this what I think it is?” I asked, the texture of delicate lace smooth under my fingertips.

She nodded in reply and my head fell to her shoulder, remembering the way the panties had looked on the hanger. My breath had caught as she’d handed them to me, imagining how she’d look from behind, the tiny scrap of black material held together by only a small row of satin buttons down the back.

I pushed her skirt further up her hips, pressing my cock against the dampened lace.

“Fuck,” she groaned as her hands moved to twist in my hair. “Take me like you used to.”

Her simple words sparked something raw and primal inside my chest.

“You mean how I couldn’t breathe until I was inside you?” I asked, groaning

as her tongue swept across her lower lip, “Yeah,” she answered shakily.

My hands moved to her waist, almost fumbling with the delicate zipper of her skirt, the heavy material between us suddenly in the way. She gasped as I pushed it down her hips to land in a puddle around her feet.

“How I drove myself mad imagining touching you again?” I murmured against her lips, brushing my fingertips along her ribs, feeling the skin react beneath my touch.

“Fuck, yes.”

“How every day I imagined what you were wearing under your clothes?” I traced the shape of her breast beneath her bra, her nipple taut under the thin lace, soft gasps and moans urging me to continue.

“I imagined you naked,” I whispered as I pulled the strap off her shoulder. “Every day.”

“What you sounded like… how you tasted.” I knelt down, my lips sweeping along her breast before taking her pink nipple into my mouth. I groaned at the feel of her against my tongue, at the way her hands tightened in my hair.

“I love it when you talk like that,” she whispered, her head quietly thudding against the door.

I moved to her other breast, my teeth scraping and nibbling, my hands exploring every inch of skin.

“I wanted to take you on every surface around us. Your desk, my desk, my car, the conference table…,”

I managed between the movement of my lips, slipping a hand along the front of her panties, my fingers circling her clit. She arched into my touch, just as she always had.

“You like that, don’t you?” I asked in a low voice, smiling against her skin.

“I still remember what it felt like… to finally have you inside me,” she answered, breathless from my teasing. Glancing up, I met her lidded eyes with my own.

“Did you imagine us together like that, baby?” I questioned, wanting to know if she had been as tormented as I was.

“All the time… from the first moment I saw you.”

I stood, groaning against her mouth, remembering how I’d wanted her to feel that way, and loving that we could talk about it now. My hand gripped the black

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satin, my thumb tracing the delicate buttons along the back, the material as soft as her skin.

“So you want me to take you like I used to?” I teased, bringing my hands to her hips and turning her around to face the door. *That was so fucking sexy.* “Fuck,” I murmured, my fingers brushing along lacy edge. “These look just like I thought they would.”

I brushed her hair to the side, my lips feathering along her shoulder, my hands gripping the thin material. I kissed just below her ear, my breath floating along her skin. “It’s a shame I’m going to ruin them.”

“Oh God, please,” she whimpered, her palms coming to rest on the wood in front of her, her nails scraping against the finish.

“Do you want that?” I taunted, my grip tightening as the seams began to tear. She arched her back and nodded silently, pushing her ass back against me.

I loved that she wanted this.

“I’m so fucking hard for you right now,” I murmured, running my jaw along her neck, knowing the roughened texture only added to her desperation. “I wanted you to say my name.” I watched as the delicate fabric pulled tight against her skin, her body now shaking with just my words. ” *Scream* my name.”

One-by-one the small buttons gave way and bounced along the carpet. The lean muscles in her back flexed with each breath, her anticipation palpable. I tore them completely, relishing her gasp as I pushed the expensive, tattered material from her body. She swore loudly, pressing her forehead against the wood.

“You are so beautiful,” I breathed, my hands encircling her waist, my eyes moving hungrily along her curves. “And I can’t wait to make you my wife.”

She turned quickly and pulled me close, silently agreeing with my words. The heat of her against me was incredible, but the smooth lace of her bra against my chest was an unwelcome barrier. I wanted to feel her and she felt the same way, the need in her frenzied kiss nearly bringing me to my knees.

“This…off,” she demanded against my mouth, and I stilled her fumbling hands to help her remove her bra.

The space between us filled with moans and pleading whispers, as her fingers trailed down my body to wrap around my cock.

I pulled back to watch along with her, trembling at the sight of her fingers moving up and down my length. She touched me as if this were new, as if she were fascinated with how I fit in her palm, exploring the textures and the shape.

Her nails scraped lightly, the soft pad of her thumb moving slowly around the head. I closed my eyes, feeling each finger as it closed around me, the rush of blood and lust hardening me further under her touch.

“I need you,” she whispered, her hands now moving to my neck, pulling me closer. My cock rested against her stomach, and I lifted my gaze, my eyes searching her face before falling to her soft, full mouth.

I fucking needed her too.

In one movement I lifted her, pressing her back against the door, a tremor rocking through me as her legs encircled my hips. My lips brushed along her shoulder as I entered her, shuddering as her warmth engulfed me, inch by perfect inch. Her head fell forward, her hand moving to the back of my head to thread tightly into my hair.

“Still like that first time?” I asked, barely able to speak.

“Yes,” she hissed, her legs tightening, her strong thighs flexing around me. With my face buried in her neck, I began moving inside of her, her body sliding against the wood with each thrust.

“I still remember every second… the way you looked underneath me,” I whispered, sucking gently on her neck.

“The way you looked as you fucked me. How it felt to know *I* made you look that way,” she said fiercely, her hips meeting me, our movements, as always, perfectly synced.

“It was like every fantasy I’d ever had,” I gasped, loving the way she gripped my shoulders, my hair, and any place she could reach. I wanted more now, so I went deeper, harder, my fingers pressing into her skin.

She lifted her arms above her head, searching in vain for something to hold on to. I moaned at the sight of her grasping, needing something to anchor her.

“If you would’ve taken me sooner, I would’ve let you…you could’ve had any part of me you wanted.”

“Don’t say that,” I begged. “Don’t say I could have had you all that time.”

My head fell to her shoulder, my muscles tensing as my release began to build.

“I wanted you so badly,” she breathed into my hair. “And now you’re mine.”

Now you’re mine…

I was hers.

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“Oh God, baby… fuck,” I gasped, so overcome by her words, I felt myself begin to tremble.

“Over there,” she motioned.

Understanding, I carried her on shaky legs to the chaise against the wall, her legs straddling my hips as I sat.

“No,” she began, shaking her head, her breaths coming in pants. “Lay down.” I felt her palms push roughly against my chest, the feel of the soft velvet cool against my back.

My eyes consumed her, my hands roaming her skin, reaching up to cup her breasts as she began to move above me.

She was perfection, completely lost in the sensation of our bodies being connected. She ran her tongue along her bottom lip before taking it between her teeth, her eyes closed in concentration, her hair tangled and cascading along her glistening skin.

Her nipples brushed against my palms as she rode me, and I traced them with my fingers before tugging lightly.

“Harder,” she gasped, her hand closing over mine, encouraging me to grip them more firmly. I loved this about her, that she could tell me what she wanted, take what was hers. She lifted her leg to rest along my shoulder, the movement forcing me deeper, the friction surrounding my cock too perfect to hold on to.

“I’m coming… I’m coming,” I moaned, panicked that she wasn’t there yet. Moving my hand between us, I circled her clit, loving the way she looked down to watch. “Are you close?”

“Fuck, yes,” she groaned. “More.”

With my free hand I gripped her roughly, my hips lifting from the cushion to bury myself deeper.

“Yes, just like that.”

She leaned forward, her hands moving to my chest, her nails digging into my skin. With a groan, I began to tense, the sensation pooling in my legs and stomach now spreading throughout my body.

She moaned my name, her voice low and desperate as I felt her come around me.

Thankful to let go, I closed my eyes and with one final thrust I released inside of her.

EROTIC EXCLUSIVE

She collapsed against my chest. “That was…” she panted, her breath almost cold as it fanned across my damp skin.

“I know,” I answered, my voice shaky. “It always is.” I wrapped my arms around her. “I’m not sure if I can walk.”

She laughed against my shoulder and I kissed her hair, exhaling deeply as I tried to catch my breath. I ran my hands along her bare back, loving these moments of perfection.

“Are you cold?” I asked as a shiver traveled through her.

“No,” she answered softly, stifling a small yawn. I chuckled as I sat up, taking her with me to the massive King sized bed.

Laying her down, I collapsed behind her, pulling her back to my chest.

“I love you,” I murmured, moving her hair to rest on the pillow above her head. She sighed and snuggled back against me, turning her head to kiss me softly.

“I can’t believe we’re getting married,” she sighed, the smile evident in her voice.

“I know,” I answered, my lips brushing along the back of her neck and up to her jaw. “I can’t believe I tricked you into saying yes.”

She laughed again, the sound still the most perfect thing to me and I watched as she lifted her arm to admire the ring on her finger.

“We’ll be a Mr. and Mrs.,” she said quietly, and I felt her cheek turn up into a smile.

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“My God,” I breathed, turning her head to find her lips again. “I…I hadn’t…”

“I know,” she answered. “I hadn’t either.”

I let the idea of her name with mine play over and over in my mind, completely unprepared for how it would make me feel.

Everything was suddenly so real. We were getting married; someday we were going to have children together. Despite all the obstacles the world had put in our way, that *we* had put in our way, we had made it.

She had agreed to be mine and I was hers.

I imagined what it would be like to see her pregnant with my baby, to build a family together. She’d made me realize how badly I’d wanted those things, how excited I was to begin our new life together.

“When do you want to get married?” I asked, my fingers trailing up and down

her arm.

She was quiet for a moment before answering. “I think this summer.” She turned her head to see me.

“Is that too soon?”

I smiled and shook my head. “I’d marry you tomorrow if you’d agree,” I teased.

“How many children do you want?” I asked, my hand unconsciously moving to rest on her flat stomach.

“Two,” she answered, followed by a slight nod of her head.

“Soon?” I asked, pulling her closer as her hands came to rest on mine.

“Soon.”

I exhaled deeply, a feeling of completeness I’d never felt expanding in my chest. My eyelids fluttered as exhaustion began to overtake me.

She yawned and sighed quietly, her thumb tracing the back of her new ring. I smiled against her skin, just as I drifted off to sleep.

I awoke the next morning to find my arms wrapped around a pillow instead of my fiancée. Rubbing my eyes and running a hand across my roughened jaw, I sat up and looked around the unusually cool room, unprepared for the sight awaiting me.

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In the balcony doorway, looking out over the now empty Paris streets, she stood. I sat up quietly, my back against the headboard, the sheet low on my hips as my eyes moved appreciatively along her body. She was completely nude, her arms outstretched and gripping the doorway, her back arched as the sun moved across her smooth, toned skin. The early rays glinted off the single item she wore; her engagement ring. Her hair was up, twisted on the top of her head, small curls falling loose and moving in the cold air.

I moved quietly to stand behind her, smiling as her arms moved over her head to tangle in the back of my hair. I wrapped the sheet around our naked bodies, pulling her close and placing a line of kisses along her neck.

“Good morning,” I whispered, loving the way she leaned back into me.

“Mmm, good morning.”

“Aren’t you cold?” I asked, tightening my grasp in an attempt to warm her cool body against my warm one.

She shrugged her shoulders. “It was getting a bit cool,” she answered.

“But it’s so beautiful and I feel so….” She trailed off and motioned to the view beyond the window, the Eiffel Tower standing against the backdrop of the lightening Paris sky.

I knew exactly what she meant.

My hand moved slowly down her body, the familiar curves and smooth lines beckoning me to explore further, but coming to rest around her waist.

I placed my chin on her shoulder and watched the world move beyond our window, a soft smile lifting her cheek against mine. Closing my eyes, I pressed another kiss against her neck, trembling slightly as a rush of emotion threatened to overwhelm me. I lingered there, filling my lungs with the familiar scent I longed for, my lips brushing along her skin, knowing I had everything in this world I cherished right here in my arms. “I love you,” she whispered, her hand moving to rest on top of mine.

“Le cœur a ses raisons,” I murmured against her skin, my eyes closed, understanding the depth of those words completely.

“The heart has its reasons,” she said softly, translating my words perfectly.

“Que la raison ne connaît pas.” I smiled, waiting for her to continue.

“Of which reason means nothing.”

Office Outtake - Voyeur

Voyeur

I placed my hands behind my head and continued counting the ceiling tiles above the bed. There were forty-seven.

Restless, I looked at the illuminated watch in the dark, swearing at the time. One a.m. here would make it four in New York. I frowned, reminding myself she’d be asleep, that waking her up was selfish. I swallowed and resumed my ceiling vigil, ignoring the way my chest constricted as I imagined her in our bed. The sheets would be twisted around her body; her soft sounds would fill the room. Would she still sleep nude without me there next to her? I swallowed as I imagined all the times I’d awaken at night and only had to reach out and touch her. I’d never take that for granted again.

Tossing the watch to the nightstand, I picked up my phone. No calls.

“Fuck,” I mumbled to myself.

Today had been long and tedious and all I’d wanted to do when I got back to my suite was sleep. Hell, I’d thought I’d be passed out before my head even hit the pillow.

EBOOK ECXLUSIVE

Apparently, I'd been wrong.

Sitting up, I finished unbuttoning my shirt, slipped it off my shoulders and tossed it to the chair next to the bed. With a resigned sigh, I stood and made my way to the bar; Scotch had always proved to be a great sleeping aid.

Tilting the glass to my lips, I reached for the remote and collapsed on the leather sofa, letting the burn of the liquor sooth my boredom. My initial search for something entertaining proved fruitless, but I finally settled on an old movie.

The black and white characters moved across the screen in front of me, their words just noise to break up the silence. Chloe would like this, I thought, remembering with a smile the countless movie marathons we had ignored as we kissed or made love on the couch. I shook my head; even mindless entertainment offered me no escape from her memory.

With my feet on the leather ottoman, I finished my drink in a long swallow. *Maybe I should just get the bottle.*

With a second drink in hand, I returned to my seat, closing my eyes as the warm liquor moved through my system. *Much better.*

I felt my muscles begin to relax as I attempted to forget the day, trying not to think of Chloe wrapped in our sheets, alone and naked. Exhaling deeply as my thoughts began to drift, I lost that battle.

The image of her, warm and soft, her skin glowing in the pale light from our bedroom window appeared in my mind. She would be snoring softly by now, one hand twisted in her hair, the other stretched out to my side of the bed. I wondered if she fell asleep quickly, if she missed me as much as I missed her…if she locked the back door before falling asleep .

"She's fine," I muttered in an attempt to reassure myself. Chloe was a grown woman who'd lived alone long before I entered her life. Unfortunately, tonight this thought did not bring me any comfort.

I frowned as I remembered our fight. She was so stubborn and I was so pushy; every argument, regardless of the subject always came down this-a battle of wills. She would tell me 'no' and I would push, she would storm off and I would slam a door. How had two such hard-headed people found each other? Shaking my head at the thought, I laughed softly to myself. We were perfect together, I mused, my smile fading as quickly as it had arrived.

I hadn't even said goodbye.

Sitting up, I set my empty glass on the table more forcefully than was needed

and ran my hands through my hair. I had regretted leaving that way all day today, thoughts of her so distracting I could hardly think. Maybe I'd been wrong? I had a tendency to be selfish at times… what exactly had we been fighting about to begin with?

Scratching my jaw, I paced the length of the room, my slightly drunken thoughts unable to leave our bed in New York. I remembered standing in the entryway before leaving, my bags at my feet as I'd listened to the sound of our empty house. No laughter filled the rooms, no lips were there to kiss me goodbye. The stillness had clenched my chest like a fist.

I walked to the window and looked out over the flickering city lights, thinking of how much she would enjoy the view, and wondering if she missed the one from my apartment in Chicago.

Maybe it wasn't so selfish to call her. I glanced over to my silent phone; maybe she'd been worried about bothering me. It was certainly possible, I mused. I turned my attention back to the skyline, seeing my sullen reflection in the glass. Maybe, I wondered, maybe she regretted the way we'd left things just as much as I did.

EBOOK ECXLUSIVE

I'd been an ass.

I missed her.

I should call.

But I'll wake her.

Maybe she's awake too.

I can't…

Suddenly, the phone buzzed from the nightstand and my head shot up. Quicker than I thought possible, it was in my hand, my heart nearly stopping as her name flashed across the screen. She had sent a text.

Chloe. It was her.

Are you awake?

She was still up?

It's after 4 there, why aren't you asleep?

A long pause followed.

You're not here.

The phone rang before I finished dialing our number.

“Hi.”

“Hi,” she answered back. My eyes closed at the sound of her soft voice. She sounded as lonely as I felt.

My chest ached as I pictured her once again.

“Are you okay? Is the back door locked?” I asked urgently, the worry in my voice clear even to me.

“The doors are locked, the alarm is set, and I’m okay. I just… I miss you.” Her voice trailed off as if she had more to say.

“Chloe,” I whispered, relief flooding through me, my earlier regret returning. “I miss you too, baby. I shouldn’t… I didn’t… ” I had meant to apologize, but now that I had her on the line, I couldn’t recall why we’d even argued. I exhaled loudly into the receiver, sitting on the edge of the bed. “Chloe, what were we even arguing about?”

She swallowed. “I don’t know anymore. About who was right… who would give in first.” She paused and I wished I could see her right then, wished I could hold her. She sighed, soft and sweet and so familiar that I found myself straining to hear any sound from home. “I’m sorry, Bennett. Sometimes I can be… stubborn and opinionated.” The last words came out in a rush and I couldn’t help but chuckle. *How alike we are, how perfect we were for each other.* I wouldn’t want it any other way.

“I love that you’re stubborn and opinionated, and to be honest, I love fighting with you because I love when we make up.” I was unable to keep from smiling as I thought back to how often that happened.

“You never back down and I love you for it, I just don’t want us to fight before parting ever again.”

“I know,” she answered, her voice cracking slightly.

“I love you, Chloe. More than I could ever tell you.” I leaned forward, my forearms on my thighs, wishing again we were together.

She sighed once more; a relieved, breathy sound that left me smiling. “I love you, too, Bennett. I didn’t even get to kiss you goodbye.”

My smile widened at her words; she knew me so well. “I didn’t get to make love to you before I left, but you’re all I’ve thought about,” I said truthfully.

“I can’t think when you talk like that.”

My insides flickered to life. “I can’t think, either… about *anything*,” I whispered.

The line was silent for a moment, only the sound of her breathing audible.

“I miss you,” she repeated, her words exactly what I needed to hear. “I miss how you smell… I miss the way you sound when I touch you.”

“Chloe…” I began, wanting to tell her I felt the same.

“Where are you?” She cut me off, her voice deeper now.

What was she doing? I wondered. “In my room.”

“Are you dressed?” she asked. I sat up, my brows lifting in surprise.

“Just my pants,” I said curiously, a smile pulling at my mouth as I awaited her response.

More silence.

“Take them off, Bennett.”

Oh, fuck. She sounded turned on, so I did as she asked without protest, picturing her again in our bed, the blankets tangled around her.

Her breath hitched, my previous image transforming into dirtier thoughts as I imagined her touching herself now. “Are you touching yourself, Chloe?”

“Maybe a little,” she teased, the sound of her sexy voice stiffening my cock.

“Where is your hand, baby?” I asked, my palm moving slowly down my chest bare to rest on my now straining erection.

“On my breast.” Picturing her touching her nipples, pinching and pulling the soft, pink skin made me groan.

“Are you naked?” I asked, hoping she was.

“Not yet.”

“Take it all off. I don’t want anything in my way.”

She complied immediately, the sound of her clothes being removed and our rustling sheets filled the line for a moment. “Done.”

I closed my eyes, gripping myself more firmly as I imagined her lying on top of the sheets, her body exposed to the colder air, nipples taut and ready for my mouth. Fuck, I wanted to be there. “Put the phone on speaker and lay it on the pillow next to you,” I said, moving to lie back against my own cool sheets.

“Okay.”

“Are the lights out?”

“Yes,” she answered, her voice edged with anticipation.

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“Close your eyes.”

“They’re closed.”

“Lay your hands on your stomach, tell me what you feel,” I told her, remembering how she felt under my fingers.

“Warm, soft…. fluttery,” she laughed quietly.

“Move them up your body, between your breasts, to your hair.”

“Okay,” she said, a bit more breathlessly than before. Her hair had always been one of my favorite things about her, the length varied from time to time, but it always felt the same, smelled the same.

“What does your hair feel like tonight, Chloe?”

I waited patiently, imaging her feeling her own hair, how the strands would look as they fell from her fingertips. She hummed a soft contented sound. “It’s soft, a little damp underneath from my shower.”

“Is it down?”

“Yes.”

“You know, one of my favorite things about you being under me is the way your hair looks spread across my pillow.”

She moaned softly, the sound alone causing my own stomach to tighten. The air in my suite was cool, but it felt like every nerve was on fire, like my skin radiated heat.

I moved my hand up to my abdomen, just as I’d asked her to do. My senses seemed to be amplified with only the sound and memory of her to focus on. I closed my eyes to my memory, recalling the texture of her hair, the feel of each muscle under my fingertips.

My pulse was racing. I wondered if hers was, too.

“Slide your hand slowly down your neck to your chest. Can you feel your heart?”

“Yes, Bennett.”

“Tell me about it.”

“It’s racing,” she answered, using the words from my own thoughts. I smiled, knowing I had caused that, hearing her swallow and breathe erratically.

“Good. Now brush your fingers along the underside of your breasts, just like I would.” I waited a moment, hearing every sound and sigh she made, knowing

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she was doing as I instructed. “What do they feel like?”

“Warm… heavy. I wish you were here,” she breathed.

“I know, baby, so do I. Touch your nipples for me, just how you like it.”

She liked me to trace along the delicate skin slowly, moving closer with each pass. She liked it gentle at first, for me to take her hardened nipple between my thumb and forefinger and squeeze gently, rolling it again before pinching. Her soft cry filled my ear and I knew exactly what she had done. I had watched her, touched her so many times, the image formed in my mind with perfect clarity.

“Bennett…” Her voice was a whimper, a soft plea filled with need.

“Pinch them harder,” I commanded. “Do it just like I would.”

“Yes,” she said breathlessly.

“Imagine my mouth there,” I began, my own previously-still hand now slipping lower, my fingertips brushing along the base of my cock. “Remember how it feels when I take them between my teeth.”

She gasped and I lifted my head, watching as the backs of my fingers moved up and down my shaft.

My erection bobbed lightly over my stomach, the sensitive head swelling from the pressure.

I imagined her in the moonlight as I touched myself, naked and open for me. She would be bare and glistening, the sight and scent of her pulling me near, drawing me into her.

“Open your legs, Chloe,” I whispered, watching my hand, picturing her beneath me, arms stretched above her head, hands gripping the headboard as I hit that deep spot she liked.

“I want you to remember what it looks like when I’m on my knees in front of you,” she said unexpectedly, her voice a sultry purr. “How it feels when I taste you.”

“I’m remembering the way you look at me when I have you in my mouth, the way it feels to have your hands wrapped roughly in my hair,” she continued, knowing what she was doing to me, to both of us.

Her breath hitched again, her throat sounded rough and dry, a note of desperation now coloring her tone. “I love when you pull me down to you… when you fuck my mouth.”

“Oh God,” I groaned, my free hand clenching beside me, twisting the sheets

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as my thumb brushed over the head of my cock. “Baby, you have no idea what it does to me to hear you talk like that.”

“God, yes,” she moaned. “Are you touching yourself?”

“I am, baby,” I answered, my eyes closing as I continued to imagine her. “I wish it was you. I wish your pussy was wrapped around me, warm and wet. God,” I grunted as my thumb found a particularly sensitive spot. “I wish you were riding me right now.”

She moaned and I closed my eyes at the sound, knowing how much she loved to watch me, often sitting on the edge of the bed, her breath heavy, her bottom lip caught between her teeth as she watched me bring myself to orgasm. She would encourage me with only her words, telling me how much she liked what she saw, instructing me on what else she wanted. Sometimes she would reward me, driving me insane as her shirt fell slowly from her shoulders, or turning to push her panties seductively down her hips.

She’d tell me to be louder, to tell her what I felt, what I needed. I’d never been freer with anyone, able to let go of control, to be led where I’d only dreamt. All these things she did with just her voice, her image, sometimes never touching me or letting me touch her. I would listen and comply, watching her eyes darken with lust, her voice full of want and praise as I would come explosively all over my chest.

“Tell me everything,” she said. The sound of fabric rustled in the background again, the image of her long legs moving restlessly in the sheets as she touched herself filling my head. “Are you in the bed now?”

“Yes.”

“And you’re naked?”

My hand moved along the length of my cock, my grip tightening with each pass. “Yes.”

Opening my eyes, I looked down to my lap, the head of my erection swollen and glistening. I hissed as I watched my cock slide effortlessly in and out of my grip.

“Tell me,” she pleaded.

“I’m stroking my cock,” I started, my hips lifting from the mattress, the feeling indescribable. “I wish you could see it, I know how much you like that.”

“Mmm,” she hummed. “I love watching you.”

“My cock is so hard, baby… all I can think about is you.”

“And what would you do if you were here?”

“I’d push you on your hands and knees and take you from behind.” My hand continued to move in tandem with my hips, my palm sliding along the shaft and rotating over the head before moving downward again. “I’d smack your perfect ass and fuck you so hard you wouldn’t be able to walk tomorrow. Or maybe I’d lay you on the kitchen counter and bury my face in that beautiful pussy.” I smiled as my name fell from her lips in a breathy sigh, my own imagination beginning to run wild.

“How would that feel, baby? We could even go shopping, there’s a La Perla in the city, and you know how much I love their dressing rooms.”

“Tease,” she whispered.

“Not a tease, a promise.” My eyes closed again, remembering the last time I’d taken her there.

The way she’d looked bent over at the waist, her hands supporting her weight on the soft velvet cushion, our eyes locked in the mirror as I’d fucked her from behind. I pictured the way I’d had to cover her mouth, how her eyes had closed and her muffled cries had sent me over the edge. “Do you remember?”

“Oh God, yes.” Her breath filtered through the speaker in shaky gasps, and indistinguishable words like, ‘ *more*,’ ‘ *please*‘ and ‘ *close*‘ seemed to tumble from her lips.

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Her wanton pleas sent a shudder through me, the rhythm of my movements now frantic and disorganized. Stroking faster, harder, my cock ached for release as my body trembled. A bead of sweat trickled down the side of my face as I lifted myself to watch, imagining her beautiful hair brushing my stomach and thighs while her head bobbed between my legs.

My thoughts were even more disjointed, my fantasies shifting wildly from one to the next. I remembered the way she felt when I’d fucked her in my car, how she’d straddled my lap in the front seat when we’d pulled over to check the map. I could almost hear the way she sounded as I’d taken her in the shower, the way my name had echoed off the tile walls and how her wet hair had clung to her back. I took what I needed from each encounter, letting the images play across my closed eyes as my head fell back to the pillow. I loved the way she sounded, the way she looked when she came.

“Open your legs wider and fuck yourself,” I said breathlessly. “Let me hear you, baby. Please. I need to hear you.” I was becoming desperate, the pressure building in my cock, the urge to thrust, to take, to scream out in release almost

too much to bear.

“I’m coming,” she moaned, throaty and deep. “Oh, God. I’m… I….”

My body tensed as I imagined her, back arched, legs open, her fingers inside her body as she came around them. “Fuck!” I shouted.

My cock surged in my hand, my release shooting powerfully onto my chest and stomach, just the way she liked. My arms shook as I continued stroking, the last remnants of my orgasm pulsing through me. With an exhausted sigh, I collapsed against the mattress, suddenly conscious of the stillness of my room, the cool air on my damp skin.

“Jesus,” she panted, her rapid breaths as labored as my own.

“I know.” I ran my fingers through my sweaty hair and looked down at myself. “I think I need a shower now.”

She chuckled softly. “I think I’m ready to sleep.” She sighed and I could almost hear the contented smile that surely graced her face. My chest warmed as I pictured it.

“Go to sleep baby, I’ll only be a phone call away when you wake up.” My mind raced through my schedule, already deciding that I would catch the next flight and hopefully be home before she woke.

“Okay.” Her breathing deepened.

“Goodnight, Chloe.” I moved to end the call when her voice sounded through the speaker.

“Bennett?”

“Chloe?”

“I love you.”

I smiled. “I love you, too.”

Office Outtake – Through The Storm

Pressing the call button to take us to the lobby, I knew my mind should have been focusing on the meeting we’d just left, or the stack of paperwork waiting for me back at the office. It wasn’t. As usual, all my attention seemed to be focused on the woman standing next to me. I didn’t know how it was possible, but she seemed to get more beautiful everyday; a fact that irritated the hell out of me.

I had hoped, or should I say *assumed*, that her appeal would fade over time. It didn’t. If anything, I found myself more drawn to her and she occupied more of

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my thoughts.

Over the last nine months I had perfected the art of ogling her while remaining undetected. Covert glances as I sat next her during a meeting. Leaving my door open and sitting just so, allowing me to watch her eat lunch at her desk. Being in the parking lot at the exact moment she pulled up in her sexy, little silver BMW.

I could name a hundred ways I'd observed her, taking her in, memorizing her body and never once been caught; until recently that is.

It had only taken one little slip. One tiny little lapse in self control to let my perfectly constructed defenses crumble around me. From the moment I touched her in that conference room, I was done.

There was no going back, and it was only getting worse.

Recently, I'd gotten sloppy. I'd let my gaze linger on her breasts for a fraction of a second too long. I'd watched as she put her fork between her perfect pink lips for a moment longer than I should have, and been busted.

She always managed to catch me now, and with a knowing smirk she would continue on with her business, never saying a word. She knew the power she held over me, and she enjoyed it.

In the beginning, I was only drawn to her body. I didn't find it difficult to separate my need for her physically from my loathing for her personally.

Lately, things were starting to blur and I found myself thinking of her in ways other than sexual. Even standing here now, I was accosted by the delicate fruity scent coming from her hair, and found myself wondering what she used to make it smell that way.

I'd never noticed these things on women before. I'd been with dozens of women in my life, and had even had one long term relationship, but I'd never found myself so interested in so many tiny details.

The doors opened, and I motioned for Ms. Mills to enter ahead of me, using the opportunity to appreciate her delectable ass.

My cock twitched as I remembered the last time I'd had my hands on it, my fingers pressing into the soft skin as she rode me. *Not helping.*

There were only two other people standing in the elevator with us, a young boy with ear buds in and an older woman lost in a conversation on her cell phone. There was no reason for me to stand so close to Ms. Mills, but I found myself practically pressed up against her side, inhaling once again her familiar scent. Fuck, even her smell turned me on.

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She didn’t protest, and being the greedy bastard that I am, I leaned in further. From my vantage point, standing nearly a foot taller than her, I was rewarded with a beautiful sight. The delicate swell of her breasts sat perfectly on display for me, and I was overwhelmed by a mental image of my cock resting between them.

Closing my eyes, I suppressed a groan and shifted slightly as I felt my cock harden further. It had been two days since we’d been together. Two days since I’d felt her tight heat wrapped around my…

“What the hell are you smiling about?”

Her voice broke me from my memories, and I looked down to see her watching me. “What?” I asked innocently. “Was I smiling?”

Tilting her head slightly, she looked around the elevator at our fellow passengers. Satisfied that they weren’t paying attention, she returned her focus to me.

“Don’t give me that,” she whispered, shaking her head. “What were you smiling about?”

I thought briefly of telling her. How would she react knowing I was remembering the way she looked on her knees in front of me, with my cock in her perfect mouth? Would she be furious? *Or*…my smile widened as I considered *another* possibility. Would she respond…favorably?

Leaning in further, my lips brushing the shell of her ear, I whispered, “I think you know exactly what I’m smiling about.” My eyes moved purposely down to her cleavage before lifting to meet hers again. I knew the moment she understood.

Pulling back slightly to see my face, she glared at me with narrowed eyes. To anyone else she may have looked furious, but I knew better. Glancing down quickly, I knew my statement had hit its mark.

Beautiful, hard nipples strained against the thin material of her dress. *Success.* I let my eyes linger on them for just a moment before lifting my head and whispering in her ear. “I thought so.”

“You son-of-” The sound of the elevator reaching our floor cut her off, and I motioned for her to lead the way. I was unable to hide my smirk as she turned quickly and stepped out of the lift, muttering obscenities under her breath.

She walked a few feet ahead of me, and I once again found my gaze focused on her ass. God, if I didn’t get to fuck her soon, I was going to explode. I was in

the middle of an exceptionally filthy fantasy when a male voice called from behind us.

"Chloe!" We both turned to see a man about her age jogging slowly towards us. "Chloe, wait!" Who the hell was this? He obviously recognized her, but judging from the puzzled expression she wore, she didn't seem to know him. *Yeah, keep it moving jack ass.*

He got within a few feet of us when she spoke. "David?" I turned to look at her and saw the moment of recognition cross her face. "Oh, my God! David, is that you?" *Who the hell was David?*

He stopped in front of us and beamed at her; a stupid, love sick expression on his face. *Oh, I don't like this at all.*

"Chloe," he said trying to catch his breath. "You recognized me." He was slightly out of breath from running, and I rolled my eyes thinking of how I could probably run circles around his scrawny ass.

"Of course, I did." I turned quickly at the soft, endearing tone of her voice. "God, it's been so long."

Who was this guy, and why did I suddenly feel like punching him in the face?

"How is it that after all these years you look even more beautiful than the last time I saw you?" His hand reached up and brushed her cheek softly. She looked down and…wait a minute. Did she blush?

She never-

"Um, yeah. Wow." She bit her lip and smiled, a nervous cough coming from her chest. "I…yeah. That was-"

"Yeah," he said softly, "Since that last…" His voice trailed off and a huge grin spread over his face.

What the—

Did they-

Fuck!

I looked at her and was horrified to see the same stupid smile on his face mirrored on hers. Alarm bells began ringing in my head as I tried to formulate a plan.

"David, what are you doing here?" I didn't miss the excited tone of her voice.

"Well," he said, moving closer. "I work here now, in this building actually. I'm an architect here on the fifth floor. I can't believe it's you. I tried to look you up

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when I got here, but I couldn't find you or your mom." His hand came up and brushed against her forearm and I really had to fight the urge to punch him.

"Yeah," she said, hesitating slightly. "I'm unlisted and mom died a couple of years ago." A sharp pain rocked through my stomach as I watched the expression on her face fall. My body moved forward slightly of its own volition to comfort her when I was blocked by David.

"Chloe, baby. I'm so sorry." Closing the distance, he took her in his arms and hugged her.

My rational mind knew he was comforting her, knew that he was only offering what any friend would; but all I saw was his arms wrapped around something that belonged to me.

"Thank you, David," she said, pushing him away slightly and wiping at her eyes. "It's fine now, really."

Looking at her with a softened expression, I could see a plan formulating in his head.

"Hey, you remember that last week you were home? Remember the bet?" His raised his eyebrows slightly, but my attention was drawn to the most adorable, unfamiliar laughter I'd ever heard coming from the woman standing next to me.

"Oh, my God! I can't believe you would bring that up!" Bending over at the waist, she continued to laugh, and I was suddenly reminded of the only other time I'd heard her laugh like that.

The day we met. I'd walked into our office for the first time and had the breath knocked out of me by the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen. She'd laughed like that then with Angela, and it struck me that she'd never done that with me. Of all the reactions I had ever incited from her, that beautiful laugh was not one of them. It made me furious to see her doing it with him.

Straightening, she wiped the tears from her eyes. "God, I haven't thought about that in years. How did you always know how to cheer me up?" She smiled at him brightly and I was horrified to realize I wanted her to smile that way at me.

"I guess I just know you. God, Chloe. You just…you look amazing." His hand slid down her arm until he was grasping her hand. "You know, I've never forgotten about you, maybe we-"

Clearing my throat loudly, they both looked up, seemingly surprised to see me there. His smile faltered as the possibility of another man in her life must have

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finally struck him. *That's right, David.*

She's mine, so back the fuck off.

"Oh!" she said, shaking her head slightly. "What's wrong with me? This is David Jones. David this is my boss, Mr. Ryan." His moment of concern was quickly replaced, as a look of sheer relief passed over him. *Shit. Her boss.*

I held my hand out to him. "Bennett Ryan," I said flatly, shaking his hand with a bit more force than was necessary. Letting go, I grinned inwardly as I watched him flex his fingers.

"*Oh*! Your *boss*! Nice to meet you, Bennett. Lucky guy getting to spend every day with my Chloe." *His Chloe?*

"Yes, she's quite a woman," I said flatly, my gaze never wavering from hers. A feeling of rage took hold of me and I knew I had to leave before I did something I'd regret. "I'll meet you at the car."

Without waiting for a response, I turned quickly and walked out the building. Calm down, Ryan.

Fuck! The cool air hit my face and I inhaled deeply, attempting to compose myself.

Who the hell was he? Had they been together? Had he touched her? My heart was pounding in my chest and it took every bit of control I had to not walk back in there and snap his neck.

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Reaching the car, the driver opened the door and I stepped inside. The quiet, dark interior did nothing to ease the fury inside me. If anything, with every second that passed without her returning I grew angrier. She was *mine*. Hadn't we settled this? How could she let him touch her?

I jumped as the door opened. Stepping in, she took her seat and avoided my gaze. The tension in the air mounted as I felt the car start moving. We sat across from each other, both looking out the window at the approaching storm, neither of us saying a word.

Shaking my head in disgust, I saw her look at me from the corner of my eye.

"What?" I said roughly.

"What do you mean what?"

"You know exactly what I mean."

"Do you have some sort of a problem, Mr. Ryan?"

"Who the hell was that?"

“That,” she answered, “is none of your business.”

“None of my…none of my business? Could you have been more obvious throwing yourself at him?”

Okay, maybe that was a bit of an exaggeration.

She turned away from the window suddenly and looked at me, a furious glint in her eye. “What the hell are you talking about?” God, she was fucking sexy when she was pissed.

“You know exactly what I’m talking about.”

“You’re insane. You know that?”

I could feel the anger coming off of her in waves. She was furious. Well, good! So was I. She just stood there and let that asshole put his hands all over her. When the hell would she learn that she was mine?

“Did you fuck him?”

“What!” Moving forward in her seat, she continued to glare at me. How dare she look shocked?

“Oh, don’t pretend like you didn’t hear me. Did you fuck him?”

“I am not going to answer that.” Sitting back, she looked away, pretending to watch out the window.

Oh, fuck that. She was *not* giving me the silent treatment.

“Oh, come on! Who the fuck was that guy?” I yelled, instantly glad for the divider between us and the driver. “You two sure seemed awfully familiar.”

I hadn’t realized how far forward I was sitting until she bolted towards me. “Don’t you dare pull this macho caveman shit with me, Bennett Ryan. You do not *own me*. I am not your possession.”

I moved closer, my face inches from hers. “The hell you aren’t.” I spat out. *Shit*. That might have gone too far. I was suddenly pushed backwards as her fists collided with my chest.

“You fucking bastard!” I hadn’t seen her this angry in a while, and I couldn’t say I blamed her. Had I really just said that? I felt a wave of disgust roll over me as I realized that was exactly how I felt. That she was my possession.

Turning suddenly she rapped her knuckles roughly on the divider and shouted. “Stop the car!”

The driver’s voice filtered back to us. “Did you say, stop the car, Ms. Mills?” *Was she fucking kidding?*

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“Yes, pull over. I’ll walk the rest of the way.” The car slowed and came to a stop as she grabbed her purse and slid towards the door.

“Are you out of your mind?” I yelled, reaching out and gripping her forearm. “You can’t go out there.

It’s dark, it’s going to rain and we’re in the middle of downtown Chicago.”

“Well, I’d rather face all those things than spend one more minute in here with your rude, chauvinistic ass.” Without another glance in my direction, she yanked her arm from my grasp and stepped out, slamming the door behind her.

Well, fuck. I sure as hell hadn’t expected that. “Jeffrey, take the car back to the garage and Ms. Mills and I will take a cab back to the office.” Bolting from my seat, I opened the door and stepped out.

It was dark and windy and I looked in both directions trying to find her. *God damn, crazy-ass woman*.

What the hell was she thinking? The car pulled away and I searched up and down the street again, panic beginning to creep into my chest.

Finally, I caught the movement of her white dress, whipping in the warm wind.

Breaking into a jog, I followed after her. How in the hell had she gotten so far in those heels? She turned a corner and I sped up, not wanting to let her out of my sight.

“Will you wait?!” I yelled out to her. Feeling drops hit the shoulders of my suit jacket, I looked up. The clouds had darkened and it was beginning to rain lightly. *Fucking perfect. Could this get any worse?*

“Stay away from me, Ryan!”

“I want to know who that was!”

“Jesus Christ! Not that it’s any of your business, but he was an old boyfriend.”

“Did you fuck him?”

“Are you kidding me with this?”

“Did you?!”

Just as I reached her, she stumbled slightly. Reaching out, I gripped her around the waist to keep her from falling.

“Fuck.” Bending over, she slipped her shoe from her foot and stood, holding a broken heel in one hand. The sky chose that moment to open up, cool drops of rain quickly running down my face. We both looked up at the sky, realizing the

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situation had just gotten worse.

Quickly, I took off my jacket and placed it over her shoulders. It wasn't much but it would help. She glared at me but slipped her arms inside; realizing the light dress she wore would not protect her much.

"Did he touch you?"

"Fuck you." Pulling away, she turned and started walking, hobbling slightly in only one shoe.

"Will you fucking stop?" I called out to her. She flipped me off and continued moving forward. I couldn't just let her walk out here in the street in only one shoe, God only knew what she could step on, and there was no way she would willingly let me help her.

Looking around quickly, I realized where we were, she was heading towards an alley that led to our parking garage. I couldn't let her go by herself. *Fuck.*

Catching up to her quickly, I grabbed her and threw her over my shoulder. She shrieked and pounded on my back. "You're always running away from me, and like some jackass, I'm always chasing after you. I'm fucking sick of it."

"Ryan, put me down!" She shouted, her voice echoed off the brick walls.

"I'm not putting you down. It's raining, you have one shoe, and we have to get to a car. Why the hell did you jump out? Do you want to get yourself killed out here?" She stilled slightly in my arms and I continued walking.

"Because you're a Neanderthal and an asshole."

"Look, I know I shouldn't have said that, but I'll be damned if I'm going to stand by while some man puts his hands on you."

She laughed softly with contempt. "You know, you don't really get to have a say in that."

Coming to a stop, I loosened my hold and let her slide slowly down the front of my body; each point of contact burning and pulsing with the electricity that flowed between us. As her face became level with mine, I gripped her tightly again, not allowing her feet touch the ground.

"I already told you, you're mine. I do not share."

Her warm breath fanned against my wet skin and her body vibrated with anger. I watched as her eyes traveled down to my lips and back up, the mental war she was fighting visible in her eyes. I knew she wanted me; wanted me every bit as much as I wanted her. We were prisoners, both knowing that we were powerless to stop this pull between us.

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My need for her ran through every cell of my body. It hit me that it might never be like this with anyone else. I hated acknowledging that, hated the power that it gave her, but I couldn't deny it either.

We stood like that for what seemed like forever, while the rain continuing to pound around us. The streets had emptied from the storm and while I heard the city moving in the distance, my only thought in the world was the woman in myarms. I needed her. Needed to claim her as my own, make her forget there had ever been anyone else. That there ever *could be* again .

Turning and walking forward slightly, I pressed her back to the wall, the air leaving her lungs in a rush as she realized what I was doing. Leaning into her further, I let her feel my hardened cock, leaving no doubt what I wanted. Her eyes widened slightly, and her gaze once again dropped to my mouth.

Closing the distance between us, I ran my nose against hers, up one side and then the down the other.

Her eyes fell closed as she took her bottom lip between her teeth, trying to keep her body's reaction from me.

"You can't hide from me," I whispered against her lips. "I know your body better than you do."

Bringing my hand up to her wet hair, I twisted my fingers into it tightly, enjoying the sudden catch of breath as I pulled her, angling her to me. My mouth brushed once lightly against hers, twice, and I smiled as a needful sigh escaped her parted lips.

"I know every moan." I pulled her hair more forcefully, tilting her head back and exposing her neck.

Running my nose along the delicate skin I continued. "I feel your heart race for me." Opening my mouth slightly, I placed soft kisses up and down her throat, relishing in the feel of her pulse pounding beneath my lips. "I see every tremor." She gasped as my free hand slid to her breast, cupping it gently, my thumb running slow circles around her hardened nipple. "And this," I said against her mouth, my hand slipping down her body and under her dress. "Never lies to me." My fingers slipped into her panties and teased the soft skin, going everywhere but where she wanted them.

Having had enough of my teasing, she gripped my hair tightly and brought her mouth to mine. I groaned as her fingers twisted, pulling me deeper into the kiss. Her leg hitched up around my hip and I couldn't help but grind myself against her, trapping my hand between us. My fingers slipped further, finding the slick

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wetness there. I throbbed painfully as I let myself imagine replacing my fingers with my cock, sliding deep inside of her.

“He may have fucked you,” I said roughly against her jaw. “But you’ll never think of anyone but me ever again.”

Groaning loudly, she arched herself into me, pressing into my hand. My fingers slid inside of her and we both gasped. She was so wet and warm and every instinct in me said to keep going, to not stop until I was lost within her.

A crash of thunder rang through the night, and lightning filled the sky, illuminating the darkened alley briefly in a blinding flash. The rain fell harder, blurring the world around us and masking our urgent moans.

Could this be real? I’d never felt so raw, as if every sense, every urge I had was amplified, pulling me towards something. Pulling away from her mouth I kissed down her neck, licking the rain drops from her skin. Under the dim street light, the shape of her straining nipples were evident beneath the thin fabric of her now soaked dress.

Pulling my hand from her hair, I roughly pushed the fabric open in the front. I felt the lace underneath tear and her perfect breast was now visible to me. Greedily, I took her nipple into my mouth, moaning at her reaction and the feel of the delicate skin against my tongue.

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Urged on by her hands in my hair, I flicked it and teased it with my teeth, needing to hear more. I hungrily memorized every sound, every moan; knowing they were all for me.

She’d said that no one else had ever made her feel this way, and I needed to believe that. I needed to know that she was as affected by me as I was by her. That I was the only one she wanted. No woman had ever broken me like this, left me needing and begging for her, willing to fall at her feet and plead for the chance to please her.

I would do anything she asked. All I needed was to know that she was mine, that no one else would touch her.

Her hands went to my belt and a brief feeling of uncertainty swept over me. Could I do this here, take her against this cold brick wall in the rain? She had my coat on, protecting her against the roughness of the stone. We were hidden and someone would have to look to actually see us, but my conscience was nagging at me.

I knew I should stop, should leave her warmth and walk away, but I couldn’t. The need to possess her, to erase him from her memory and bury myself inside

her body was building. I couldn't stop. As if sensing my conflict she tugged on my belt, drawing my attention.

"Nobody can see us," she whispered. Her words shot straight through me, my already aching cock becoming almost painful. I didn't know how, but she always knew what I needed. She wanted me, wanted this.

Her words her words acted like fuel on the already raging fire inside me, and I knew I couldn't wait any longer. Another crack of thunder filled the sky just as she freed me from my pants. I hissed at the sensation of the cool night air on my rigid cock. Everything about tonight was so unreal, so intense that I had to keep telling myself it wasn't a dream.

Gripping her panties, I pushed them aside, looking up when her hand stopped me. Our eyes met and she shook her head slightly, moving my hand to the thin satin ribbon on her hip. She closed my fist around the fabric, and I realized what she wanted.

Things were changing; I knew she felt it too, but maybe she wasn't ready to acknowledge it yet. She needed the rawness and the urgency. Maybe it was her way of silently giving in without having to say it. I didn't care.

Pulling her mouth quickly to mine, I wrapped the thin ribbon around my hand and pulled roughly.

The sound of ripping lace, mingled with her soft cry against my lips. I shoved my newest memento into the pocket of my jacket she wore, and bent slightly to pick her up.

I lifted her and her legs wrapped easily around my hips, bringing the tip of my cock against her wet heat. The contrast between her and the cool air caused me to gasp, my hips pushing towards her automatically. The tip slid inside her and I had to stop, my body shaking with the urge to come.

Whimpering slightly, she arched her body, trying to drive me further inside of her. Looking down, my eyes closed tightly, I shook my head. "No," I begged, my voice ragged with restraint. "Wait…just give me a second."

Placing a hand on each side of my jaw, she lifted my face to meet hers, pressing her lips against mine.

The kiss started out softly, distracting me briefly from the urge to plunge into her. Slowly it changed, becoming more needful, more wanton. Her lips molded around mine, her tongue plunging into my mouth, and her moans sending waves of lust through me.

Having regained some of my control, I met her eyes as I eased myself into her. Pausing, I clenched my jaw tightly as I struggled to remain still, allowing her to adjust to me.

Her head fell forward, the soft rush of her warm breath fanning across my neck. “You feel so good,” she moaned, shaking her head slightly. “I never knew it could be like this.”

“Me either,” I whispered, pressing my lips against her hair.

“Don’t stop.” Her words sent a feeling of relief through me. She felt it too.

Rolling her hips against me, I couldn’t fight the urge to move anymore. Pulling out slowly, I drove back into her, the air leaving her lungs as I filled her completely. I began to thrust deeply, my mind clearing of all thoughts but the beautiful woman wrapped around me and the torturous pleasure building inside.

The rain poured down as we became lost in each other, our grunts and moans occasionally punctuated by a crack of thunder or a flash of lightning. My balls began to tighten and the familiar pressure began to build in my stomach, I knew I wouldn’t last long.

“I’m so close,” I gasped into her mouth. “Please come with me.”

“Oh, God.” I felt the familiar tightening around my cock and knew that she was there. “Harder.” I let go of the last of my restraint as I drove into her, and was rewarded with the full body experience of her approaching orgasm. She trembled in my arms and I gripped her even more tightly, unable to get close enough. With one last thrust, we both cried out, my body convulsing as I came inside her.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

I remained there, not wanting to leave her warmth or let her go, until I noticed her shivering slightly.

Lowering her slowly, I set her down, supporting her weight as she righted her clothing.

I quickly tucked myself back into my pants and felt a small stab of guilt as I looked up and saw her fingering the torn strap of her bra. Looking up at me she raised an eyebrow, and I tried to hide my smirk as I realized what I’d done.

“Sorry,” I said quietly.

“Sure you are,” she teased.

Reaching out I swept a piece of wet hair from her face and pulled my jacket tighter around her.

Suddenly, I fully grasped what had happened. It was dark, we were both

soaked through, and we were standing in an alley. Not more than a block away, I could see the lights from the office parking garage.

Taking a deep breath, I pulled away slightly, and held out my hand. She looked at it for a long moment, before looking up to my face with a questioning expression. Slowly, she placed her hand in mine, a soft smile lifting the corners of her mouth.

Squeezing it gently, I brought my eyes to hers, and returned her smile.

Nothing was said as we turned and began walking up the alleyway, both of us lost in our own thoughts. The city was slowly coming back to life after the storm and the sounds of people and traffic once again invaded our little world.

The streets were lined with heavy puddles and the brick walls glittered from the dim street lights.

The garage loomed off in the distance, and I knew that even though it seemed far away, it would be the shortest walk of my life. Every step took us closer to a reality I knew I wasn't ready to re-enter yet.

I looked at the woman beside me, biting her lip, her forehead creased in worry. What was she thinking? Was she still angry with me? I didn't think so, although she had every right to be. It seemed I was always saying the wrong thing to her, no matter how I really felt. She brought out a side in me that I'd never known before. I was always a calm, level-headed thinker, but where she was concerned, everything seemed so basic, so raw.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

My mind wandered back to David. Who was he? They had obviously shared something together.

Had she loved him?

I shook my head slightly. Where was all this coming from? This was just physical. Eventually, we would have our fill and move on. I was almost sure that I didn't want more than that.

Looking down at our entwined hands, I knew I was kidding myself.

Her hand was soft and warm in mine, and I was struck by how right it felt. A strange feeling gripped my chest as I realized, I didn't want to let it go. The truth of that statement nearly took my breath away. I knew it with everything that I was; I didn't want to let her go.

We would be in Seattle in a couple of days, and I knew I needed to sort some things out, make some decisions.

Looking at her one last time before we stepped into the bright fluorescent light

of the garage, I was sure about one thing.

I just wanted *her*. Chloe.

Office Outtake – Seulement Toi

Fucking perfection was currently hovering above me - moaning and writing, riding my cock like her life depended on it. I know mine did.

My hands slid down her naked body, relishing in silky skin and soft curves, pausing to rest on her hips. My grip tightened, pulling her to me, guiding her movements as she raised and lowered herself onto me.

Not that she needed my help.

I watched her, mesmerized by the unbridled pleasure evident in her expression.

She was unhinged.

Her dark hair fell in loose, finger tangled waves across her shoulders and along the tops of her breasts. Pink nipples pushed themselves closer to my eager mouth with each rock of her hips, taunting me, begging me to take them between my hungry lips. Eyes closed, mouth slightly open, she murmured my name over and over.

We were on the large leather couch in the living room, the cool fall rain cascading down the windows surrounding us, the movie we'd been watching long forgotten. Her clothes lay in a pile on the floor at my feet, my pants pushed down to my ankles.

"You're so fucking beautiful," I said, still amazed that this woman was mine. My fingers trailed up her body, along the skin I knew better than my own, to thread into her hair. "I love watching you fuck me."

"God, I *love* hearing you talk like that," she whispered. She came down onto me more forcefully and I groaned, feeling my cock slip even further into her, the sensation nearly driving me over the edge.

Releasing her hold from the couch, she shoved her fingers into my hair, pulling me to her. I smiled, taking her nipple into my mouth, loving the way it hardened against my tongue and the way she held me to her breast.

"You like it when I talk dirty to you, baby?" I murmured against her skin, my hands rubbing up and down her back.

"Yes," she answered breathlessly, reaching behind me to grip the back of the couch.

BOOKEXLUSIVE

“Do you want to hear how I love being inside of you? How it feels like you’re consuming me and I can’t ever get deep enough?” She licked her dry lips and closed her eyes again, a deep, wanton groan escaping her open mouth.

“I can feel you wrapped around my cock, Chloe. I can feel you throbbing around me.”

My hands moved to her ass and pulled her roughly to me, my hips thrusting up to meet her, my finger grazing lower and lingering for a moment. She moaned loudly with the movement, her muscles clenching momentarily around my cock.

Had she liked that?

I did it again, my finger pressing against her more firmly.

“Oh fuck, Bennett!”

“Do you like that, Chloe?”

She groaned, nodding slightly as she rested her forehead against my shoulder.

“Do you want me to do it again?”

“Yes,” she pleaded.

“Would you like me to fuck you there?” *Oh please. Oh please*.

“God, yes,” she said, her voice a mere whisper against my skin.

My mind flashed to an image of having her that way, of pushing into her, claiming her in a way I’d never done before. I nearly came with the intensity of it.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

Her movements sped up, each rock of her hips taking me deeper, pressing her ass back against my hand. I continued to touch her, to brush against the delicate skin, my fingers pressing firmly, yet never penetrating.

“Yes, Chloe. Ride me,” I begged. “Fuck, don’t stop, baby. *God, don’t stop*.” Her breasts hovered near my face and I leaned in, taking one hardened nipple into my mouth and sucking hungrily before dragging my teeth across it.

“Fuck, Bennett. God that feels so good.” Her movements became frantic and I swore as she began to tighten around my cock.

“Oh, baby. I can feel you coming. Oh God!” Wrapping my hands around her shoulders, I pulled her roughly down onto me, my body tensing as I released deep inside of her. She whispered my name as she stilled, her chest still heaving, her damp hair clinging to her cheeks and shoulders.

“I fucking love you,” I panted. “That was so much better than watching Die Hard.”

She laughed above me and I groaned, my head falling against the couch as the movement caused her muscles to tighten momentarily around me.

“I would agree,” she teased, smiling against my lips, her hands brushing the hair off my forehead. I helped her up and lay us both down on the couch, covering our naked and exhausted bodies in a nearby blanket.

She snuggled into my chest, her leg hitched onto my hip, our bodies pressed together. We held each other and listened to the falling rain against the window as we talked in hushed voices and kissed lazily before falling asleep.

I woke alone a few hours later, the smells of dinner coming from the kitchen. Standing from the couch, I pulled on my jeans and crossed the room, smiling to see her in only her panties and tank top, a huge pan of stir fry on the stove in front of her.

“Beautiful?” I called from the doorway. She looked up and I felt the familiar pull in my chest as she smiled at me. “I’m gonna jump in the shower and I’ll be right out.” Walking up to me, she stood on her toes and placed a long, chaste kiss against my lips.

“Dinner will be ready when you’re out.”

“I love you,” I whispered against her mouth. “I’ll hurry.”

She nodded and shooed me out, smacking my ass as I turned. I shook my head, laughing as I headed to the shower.

Under the hot spray, my mind wandered back to our afternoon activity on the couch. Sex hadn’t been my plan when I’d started the movie and pulled her onto my lap. We’d lasted maybe fifteen minutes before her hands began to wander and were wrapped around my cock. I laughed to myself, the sound echoing off the marble as I realized I was basically in love with the female version of me.

Her reaction to my accidental fondling had surprised me. I’d fantasized of having her in every way imaginable, but I’d never dreamed that she could share some of those same desires. I’d never done that with a woman, in fact, I’d never even considered it with anyone before her. It was the kind of thing you watched in dirty movies or thought about while you jerked off - it was the taboo, the forbidden. But just like everything else with Chloe, this was different.

I wanted her completely; I wanted us to explore each other’s bodies, experience new things together.

Physically, there had never been any limits between us. My body reacted to her on its own, to her very nearness. And yet, there was something about this

conversation that I was hesitant to discuss with her. Was I worried that she would say no? Was I worried she would think I was a pervert? I couldn't help but laugh as I realized she already knew that.

We could have an adult conversation about our fantasies and what we wanted to share.

"Baby?" I began, the piece of French bread I held in my hands quickly turning into a pile of crumbs on my plate. I'd been attempting to say something for the last ten minutes, my apprehension gathering strength with each tick of the antique clock in the hallway.

"Hmm?" she hummed, distracted.

She took a sip of her wine, her eyes focused on the magazine in front of her. I watched as she reached up to tuck a rogue curl behind her ear, the pencil she often used to tame the unruly waves unable to keep it all contained. She absentmindedly pushed her glasses higher up onto the bridge of her nose, and I was temporarily distracted from my anxiety by one of my reoccurring librarian fantasies.

"Bennett?" I started and met her eyes, the image of her naked and bent over a book cart slowly retreating.

"Um…" I began, my addled thoughts still clinging to the image of naked Chloe.

She smiled then, her eyebrows lifting as if she could see right into my dirty mind.

"You were going to ask me something?" I didn't miss the amused tone of her voice.

"Right." I ran my hand roughly through my hair and paused at the sound of her quiet laughter.

"Bennett, are you nervous about something?" she questioned, the corner of her mouth lifting into a mischievous smirk.

"No," I lied, wishing I'd just grow a set and get this over with. "I was just wondering…I mean I couldn't help but notice back at the couch-"

"Mmmm," she purred, taking her lower lip between her teeth and leaning forward. It was obvious I had her full attention now. "I *liked* the couch."

I groaned, my lower half responding instantly to her suggestive tone.

"Well," I began, leaning forward as well, my forearms resting on the smooth wooden table. "I couldn't help but notice that you seemed to like it when I…"

FBOOK EXCLUSIVE

“When *you*…?” She paused as she waited for me to continue, a small smirk turning up the corner of her sexy mouth.

I watched her through narrowed eyes, knowing that she understood exactly what I was talking about.

“When I touched your hot little ass,” I answered, loving the way she played with me.

” *Ohhh*.” she breathed. ” *That*.”

“Yes, *that*. Have you ever…or I mean, is that something you’re *interested in*?”

“Yes.”

“I’m sorry, I shou….wait. Did you just say ‘yes’?” I gazed at her in astonishment.

“Yes. That is something I would be interested in. Why do you look so surprised?”

I leaned back into my chair, my jaw slackened in disbelief. Could this really be possible? I adjusted myself slightly as her words replayed in my head.

“So you’re saying…”

“Yes,” she smiled, running her finger around the top of her wine glass.

“That you’ll let me…”

“Yes,” she growled, biting her lip and staring at my mouth.

“Fuck you-“

” *Yes*, Bennett,” she taunted, clearly loving my obvious enthusiasm. “Do *you* not want to?”

Was she kidding?

“Of course I want to! I just never imagined you would be so… *agreeable*.” My gaze fell to my massacred bread briefly as I considered this. “Have you ever…?”

She shook her head slightly, her eyes once again on her magazine. “Not technically.”

“Wait. What?” My head snapped up. “What do you mean by ‘not *technically*‘?”

“Well, I haven’t done that with another person, but I’ve experimented.”

My brain couldn’t even comprehend what she was telling me. *Did this mean that she*-? My open-mouthed expression must have clued her in.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

“I have toys, baby,” she said, licking her lips. She shrugged innocently, “I was curious.”

“Oh my God,” I groaned, scrubbing my hands over my face. “My brain can’t even comprehend this conversation. If I imagine you doing that, I’m going to fucking come in my pants.”

“You’re such a man.” She shook her head and laughed, rolling her eyes as she watched me. “Bennett, I’m a grown woman. I know what I like and how to take care of it.”

I continued to watch her, my mind completely devoid of any response. She tilted her head, her eyebrow lifting, and a devilish smile on her face.

“You like thinking about that, baby? About my fingers in my pussy while I use a toy to fuck my ass?”

” *Jesus Christ*,” I breathed, adjusting myself for the third time since this conversation had started. “I think I need some alone time in the shower.”

She laughed, obviously pleased with herself and stood, rounding the table to whisper in my ear.

“Come on, I’ll show you.”

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Weeks had passed since our initial conversation, and during that time, Chloe introduced me to her toy collection. We had experimented, sometimes using them together, and sometimes she let me watch as she used them on herself. I fucking loved those times.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

I found out that Chloe liked the toy moving in her when my tongue was pressed against her clit. She liked playing on all fours, driving me absolutely insane from the chair in the corner where she told me to sit.

I learned how she liked to touch herself, how much pressure to use and that the most important thing was to be gentle and go slow. The first time she let me slide a glass plug into her ass, I nearly came at the sight. The second time, the sound of her screams as she came had me exploding in my own hand.

We had yet to progress beyond this point, and while I looked forward to sharing that with her, I waited patiently.

Although I never regretted the way our relationship began, I often found myself thinking of all that we had missed. We had always been rushed, always hiding from our feelings and never taking the time to savor our first moments together. I couldn’t change the past, but I could ensure I didn’t make the same
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mistake twice.

When the time came, I wanted it to be the ‘first time’ we never had. I wanted to give instead of take, cherish instead of ravage and bring us together instead of pushing us apart.

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I woke to the feel of warm and persistent lips running down my neck and across my chest. I sighed in pleasure, her silky hair brushing along my skin and the orange scent of her shampoo clinging heavily in the air.

“Baby?” I whispered, my voice still thick with sleep. I brushed my fingertips along her sides and groaned when I realized that she was already naked.

“I want you,” she murmured against my skin.

“Chloe.” I brushed my fingers along her cheek, her words and the *feel* of her going straight to my cock.

“I want you too, *always*.”

Her lips moved down my abdomen as her fingers hooked into the waistband of my boxer briefs. I lifted my hips as she slid them down my legs, tossing them impatiently to the floor. She kissed her way back up my legs and I hissed as she bit along my hip, her lips pressing softly against my tattoo.

“I love it when you’re like this, baby.” I lifted my head from the pillow, watching as her mouth moved along my body, my cock hardening as she neared. “I love it when you want me so much you wake me up and take what’s yours.”

“I want you to take me, Bennett,” she groaned, her lips brushing against the head. “I want *this*,” she kissed it more firmly. “Inside me.”

My head fell back, the heel of my hands pressing against my eyes. I felt her warm breath, her soft lips sweep along the shaft, her teeth drag gently across the tip.

“Fuck, Chloe,” I groaned, my muscles tensing as she teased me. I pushed up onto my elbows to watch, unable to look away from the image of her between my legs, her tongue reaching out to taste my cock. She moaned in pleasure, the vibration pulsing through my body as I watched her take me into her mouth. Her eyes drifted closed, the twinkling city lights beyond the windows seeming to disappear as my world centered on what she was making me feel.

She looked up at me, her gaze locking with mine as her mouth moved up and down along my length.

Her hand wrapped around the base of my cock, her tongue circling the head.
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“Fuck, come here,” I commanded, pulling her up toward me, my hand moving into her hair. “What was it you said you wanted?”

Her naked skin seemed to glow in the dim light, her beautiful dark hair wild and tangled from sleep.

She touched her lips to mine, her kiss beginning chastely, her mouth warm and welcoming. She pressed softly, lingering before pulling away. She waited, her lips just out of reach, my pulse thrumming in my ears.

My eyes fell to her mouth, needing to taste it, remembering how it looked wrapped around me. Her lips parted, her tongue darting out slowly, flicking mine for only the briefest second.

She pulled back, hovering over me.

“I want,” she began, her tongue sweeping across my bottom lip.

“You.” She licked the corner of my mouth.

“To take me.” Her teeth tugged at my bottom lip.

” *Everywhere*.”

I moaned deeply, her words going straight to my cock, the meaning of them ringing loudly in my ears.

My tongue reached out to slide against hers, the tips circling between us, my eyes rolling closed. My hands fisted tightly into her hair as I tasted her mouth, a deep moan emanating from within my chest.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

“Chloe, are you sure?” I asked between kisses.

“I’ve always been sure. I want you to have all of me, Bennett.”

“I love you so much, Chloe. You’re everything in this world that’s important to me.” My thumb traced along her lower lip as I spoke, hoping she knew the depth of my words. Her breath hitched, her eyes flickering to my lips and back.

“I never doubt that anymore,” she murmured, lifting her chin to kiss me softly. “And I love you too.”

Her words soothed a rough and hungry part of me I didn’t know still existed.

“Thank you,” I said softly, attempting to swallow around the lump in my throat. My whispered voice went no farther than the space between us, but I knew she heard.

Unable to keep from touching her any longer, I pulled her lips to mine, my pulse increasing at the familiar way she fit against me. She moaned into my mouth and I rolled us so that I was now hovering over her, my weight on my

forearms. I tasted her lips, her collar bone, the soft skin beneath her ear.

“I want to have you, *all* of you,” I said into her neck.

Her hands ran up and down my body, her leg wrapping around my calf, my cock slipping between us and brushing against her clit.

I ached to be inside of her but knew I needed to take my time. I rocked my hips, my length teasing the slickened skin. Not breaking our kiss, I reached over, fumbling to open the nightstand drawer to remove the small bottle of lube and vibrator kept there.

“You’re so beautiful, Chloe.” I whispered against her breast, still awed that this perfect creature was mine. I circled my tongue around her nipple, groaning at the frantic way her hands threaded into my hair. I moved to the other, spurred on by her breathless pleas for more.

“Bennett,” she sighed, arching her back and offering herself to me.

“I love the way you taste,” I began, continuing my path downward. “But I’m a greedy bastard and want more.”

She swore, a trail of goose bumps spreading across her skin in anticipation.

I took my time and smiled at the way she held my head, guiding me, leading me to her sex.

“Open up for me, baby,” I whispered against her hip. She did as I asked and spread her legs, as eager as I was for what was to come.

Leaning in, I placed a kiss against her clit before dragging my tongue across it. I closed my eyes, moaning in pleasure as I tasted her. Her grip in my hair tightened almost painfully as I took it into my mouth and sucked gently, her hips lifting up off the mattress to meet me. I held her open with one hand as I opened the small bottle of lube, coating the vibrator and my fingers.

Rolling us onto our sides, I continued to taste her, reaching around her body to gently apply the lube.

“Is this what you want?” I pressed the vibrator against her, the quiet humming muffled against her skin. She moaned loudly, her hips pushing back against my hands.

“For starters,” she taunted, reaching for the lamp on the bedside table.

“Fuck, Chloe,” I swore, loving that she wasn’t afraid to tell me what she wanted. “If you want me to stop, all you have to do is tell me, but if you turn on that light and I can see this perfectly, I’ll never make it to the big show. Okay?”

“No, don’t stop,” she breathed, shaking her head.

She rocked her hips again, the tip of the vibrator slipping into her ever so slightly. I felt her shudder in my arms as I continued to taste her. I kissed her clit, the inside of her thighs, anything I could reach.

“Okay?” I asked, smiling as she moaned and pushed back even more. I began to move it slowly in and out, pushing it deeper with each movement. Her body rocked in time with my strokes, her sounds growing louder as the minutes passed.

I reached down with one hand and stroked myself; the mere thought of what we were doing was enough to make me come.

“I can’t wait until this is my cock, Chloe,” I groaned against her, continuing to push it in and out of her.

“Yes. Oh God, yes,” she moaned. Her hands wrapped in my hair, her leg draped across my shoulder, holding me to her as she fucked my face.

“I want you inside of me. *Please,”* she begged, her hips rocking roughly back and forth, her muscles clenching the toy inside.

My body shook with need as she said those words.

Removing the vibrator, I moved up her body, hungry for her lips. Her hands reached between us, grasping my cock firmly.

“Do you feel how bad I want you, Chloe? Can you feel how I’m aching to be inside of you?” I asked, dragging my teeth roughly across her shoulder.

“Yes, baby. I want you so bad.”

I reached for the bottle and felt her stop me.

“Let me,” she said, taking it from my hands. I groaned, pressing my forehead into her neck as she coated my erection, her slick hands sliding up and down my length.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” I asked, swallowing hard as I tried to control my breathing. “We don-“

“I’m sure,” she began, pulling back slightly to meet my eyes. “Don’t worry, it will be perfect.”

“I know,” I replied, my lips brushing against hers. “Everything with you is.”

Her eyes closed and she shook her head.

“How do you do that? Make even *this* romantic?” she murmured, a smile in her voice. Her nose brushed against mine as I held the back of her head.

BBOOKTICKLUSIVE

“Because being inside you is something I’ll never take for granted again.”

“I love you so much,” she murmured against my parted lips. My tongue slid against hers as she closed the distance between us. My hands wove into her hair, pulling her to me, every inch of skin now pressed against hers. Our kiss deepened, our soft moans filling the room. I sucked her bottom lip between mine, the taste of her still on my tongue.

“Need you so much,” she said breathlessly. “Please.”

“Where do you want me,” I panted between kisses, my need to be inside of her becoming desperate.

“Behind me.”

I pulled her to her knees, arranging the pillows on the bed and moving her in front of me. I kissed along her shoulders, brushing her hair aside to taste her neck. Her pulse beat wildly beneath my lips as her hips pushed back against me. She leaned forward, her hands and knees on the mattress, the pillows stacked beneath her.

She looked so fucking beautiful like this, bent over and waiting for me, and I couldn’t keep my hands from moving hungrily over her skin. I leaned forward and brushed my lips along her spine, applying more lube to both of us and positioning the tip against her.

EBOOK EXCLUSIVE

My body was trembling, whether in fear or anticipation, I wasn’t sure.

“This is going to be all you, baby. You’re in charge so push back into me as slowly as you need.”

She nodded, her ribs expanding under my hands as she breathed in deeply and pressed against me.

We both gasped as I entered her slightly. She tensed and I gripped her hips, stopping her.

“Are you okay?” I asked, my voice shaking with the strain of not thrusting into her. I brushed my lips along her back, my thumb tracing the newly tattooed words that mirrored my own.

“I’m fine,” she began. “Don’t stop.”

“Just promise me you’ll tell me if I hurt you,” I pleaded, the thought of causing her pain worse than the idea of suffering it myself.

“I promise.”

I ran my hands up and down her back, biting my lip as she moved, conscious

of every millimeter of skin as it slipped inside of her. The feeling was exquisite, the tightness more than I ever expected. I felt pressure and she paused, her shoulders shaking slightly as the head slipped inside.

Her hands twisted in the sheets, a shaky moan escaping from between her lips. Sliding my hands along her waist, I reached between her legs, stroking her clit to help her relax.

“Are you okay? Chloe?” I was terrified that she was hurting and not telling me, that she would cause herself pain to give me pleasure. We had been working up to this, but what if it wasn’t enough?

“God, Bennett. You feel…”

“Chloe, baby? Please, are you hurting?”

She shook her head, surprising me by pushing back again, my cock slipping deeper inside of her. I bit my lip to keep from crying out-the feeling, the sight, the moment almost too much.

I shook as I watched myself move into her, my shaft disappearing within her body inch by inch.

“Fuck, Chloe. The way you feel…the way this looks…”

“I know,” she began, her voice husky and full of lust. “I just…give me a second.”

Leaning forward, careful to not push into her any deeper, I massaged her back, her arms, doing what ever I could to help relax her.

“Baby, you’re doing so good,” I whispered between kisses. “I love you, Chloe.”

“So good,” she moaned, the words so quiet I had to strain to hear them. “I never knew…I was a little overwhelmed.”

I exhaled deeply, pressing my forehead against her shoulder.

She moved again and I couldn’t stop the groan as her ass came to rest flush against my hips.

“Oh, God,” she groaned, rolling her hips slightly.

“Tell me how it feels,” I asked, my body pulled taught, my skin damp with sweat.

“I feel,” she moved forward experimentally and pushed back, my cock once again filling her completely. “I feel…consumed.”

“I know,” I whispered. The closeness of being joined with her like this was

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nearly overtaking me.

“Move in me, Bennett,” she begged, rocking her hips against me. “Please.”

I moved slowly at first, my motions hesitant, wanting for her to lead the way. She rocked against me with purpose, each thrust becoming quicker, taking me deeper.

“Touch me,” she breathed as she leaned forward onto her forearms. My hands roamed her body, my fingers gripping her hips tightly, cupping her breasts and twisting her nipples. We both groaned each time I entered her again, a symphony of words and moans filling the room.

“Gonna come, baby. You look so good…you feel… *Fuck*.” I watched myself slip in and out of her. “You are mine, Chloe. Now *every* part of you is mine.”

She nodded, her muscles beginning to tighten around me.

“I need more,” she moaned. “I need to feel you.”

I pulled her to my chest, her back against me as she settled onto my lap, her legs resting on either side of mine.

“Is this better?” I asked, my hand cupping her breast, the other sliding down to brush against her clit.

She moaned loudly and nodded, her body leaning into mine, this position allowing her to raise and lower herself, controlling the pace. She held me deep inside her body, her movements steady and slow. Brushing her hair from her damp skin, I kissed along her neck and whispered into her ear.

“You feel so good, baby,” I whispered, my fingers finding a rhythm as I stroked her. I let one slip down and circle her slick entrance, her moans growing louder the bolder I became. I pinched her clit and she cried out, her head falling forward as she rode me.

“I love that I’m the only one to ever know this with you, that I’m the only one you’ve shared this with.”

She sighed heavily, our bodies moving together, the sound of rustling sheets accompanying our soft pants.

“Say something,” she pleaded, her hands reaching behind to thread into my hair.

“Il n’y aura jamais une autre pour moi. Seulement toi,” I said softly into her ear. “There will never be another for me, Chloe. *Only* you.”

Her muscles contracted around me, her nipples hard under my fingertips. I

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slipped a finger inside her, feeling my cock just beyond the thin barrier.

“Chloe,” I gasped, every thought focused on the exquisite pleasure building inside of me. “Please come.

I can’t…I’m…I’m-“

She called my name, her body tightening, her back arching away from me. I tensed, my cock surging as I came inside of her, murmuring her name over and over against her skin.

Time seemed to stop, my eyes closed, my head began to spin. She slumped against me and I held her, laying her down gently against the cool sheets.

“Bennett,” she sighed. I kissed her cheek; her skin warm, her expression content.

I reached for the towel near the bed and cleaned us up before pulling her to me.

“Thank you for trusting me,” I said quietly into her hair. My fingers toyed with the strands as she snuggled into my chest.

“I trust you more than anything,” she whispered, her lips brushing along my shoulder. She seemed to be hesitating, wanting to say something. I leaned to kiss her lips, encouraging her. “Bennett?”

“Mmmm?” I murmured.

“Have you…have *you* done that before?” Her fingers traced soft circles along my chest, her sudden uncertainty a vast change from the vixen just minutes before.

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I pulled away, looking into her eyes as I shook my head.

“Never.”

She smiled and my heart skipped a beat.

“So, this was the first time for *both* of us?” She searched my face, expectantly.

I nodded, unable to see her smile and not return it.

Her eyes seemed to fill with tears before she blinked them away.

“Thank you.”

And I knew exactly what she meant.

Office Outtake – Rosalie Has An Epiphany – Side-shot

Early Evening

I looked at my reflection in the mirror, putting the finishing touches on my

makeup and thinking about the evening to come.

Emmett and I were having dinner with the rest of the family, and a couple of guests, at my in-laws. I love my husband's family even more than my own, but there were generally fireworks of one sort or another when we were all together. There's no way to have that many different personalities in one room for any amount of time without something happening, and I knew tonight wouldn't be any different.

The doorbell rang, and I heard Carrington squealing, so I knew our sitter Vicki was here. I bent over the re-buckle the strap on my shoes when I felt Em's hands on my hips, chuckling as he pulled me back into him.

"Emmett Ryan, we do NOT have time for this now," I whispered, loving the feel of my big husband showing me how much he wanted me.

"Babe, you didn't really think I could come around the corner to a view like that and not try to get a piece, did you?"

I turned to him and melted into his arms, wishing that we did have time to do all the naughty things I knew we were both thinking about. We'd only been married for two years, but I was pregnant for part of that and now we had a toddler. There were plenty of reasons why we wouldn't still have a spark, but we did-now more than ever, it seemed.

His big hands slid down my back while he trailed hot kisses up my neck to whisper in my ear. I felt goose bumps rise where his lips touched, my nipples hardening almost painfully and my panties threatening to combust. *Damn, why did this dinner have to be tonight?*

"Rose, there is no way I can sit at this dinner with my family when you look so fucking amazing. Don't you know that all I'm going to be thinking about is how much I want to give it to you?"

It would be just as difficult for me, and I realized that I wanted a taste of my husband now, before he was off-limits for the next five hours or so. I pushed back away from him to walk across our bedroom, stopping to look out the window into the garden below. I could see Vicki playing with Carr in the sandbox, and I knew they wouldn't be back in the house anytime soon.

I turned to look at Emmett, licking my lips and looking up through my lashes. He was still standing by my dressing table, but when he saw my expression he started to walk towards me. I met him halfway, using momentum to push him backwards and onto our bed. He sat up and reached for me as I knelt as his feet and grabbed for his belt buckle, but we both froze when Carrington's high-

pitched scream sounded through the house.

“Mommy! I want my mommy!”

I was halfway down the stairs before she’d even finished screaming my name for the second time, and I rushed to take her from Vicki.

“Carebear…what happened, honeybunch?”

I was looking her over from top to bottom frantically, but I couldn’t see anything wrong.

“Dere was a ‘pider, mommy…a big, pat ‘pider,” she cried into my shoulder.

I felt relief wash over me immediately, and I heard Emmett laughing softly as he came down the stairs to join us. He wrapped his arms around us both, and we stood there for a few moments, murmuring reassurances to our baby girl until her crying had tapered off.

At just the right moment, Vicki offered to play Carr’s favorite game, and she kicked to be put down to run off into her playroom. I smiled my thanks to Vicki as she walked after her, and turned to put my arms into the jacket that Emmett was holding.

He gave me a crooked smile as our eyes met, and we linked hands as we headed out the front door. Neither of us needed to say a thing; we both knew this was going to be a *very* long night.

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The Dinner Party

It was a short drive to Carlisle’s and Esme’s, but we were both still so frustrated that it seemed to take forever. When we finally pulled up to the house, Emmett came around to open my door and help me out. As I stood, he grabbed me and pushed me up against the car, making me dizzy with desire almost instantly. I gave into it for a moment, but had to force myself to slide out from under him and run for the house. One more minute and we would have ended up slipping into the downstairs bathroom for a quickie. The thought of him taking me like that was exciting; the thought of getting caught fucking like teenagers at my in-laws’ was not…at ALL.

Carlisle opened the door just as I reached it, and I said hello and hugged him quickly before slipping into the powder room to make sure I was presentable. Nothing like impromptu driveway groping to make you insecure about how you look.

I walked into the kitchen to find Emmett with a big grin on his face, trying to steal an enormous chunk from one of the loaves of bread on the counter. I

swatted his hands away, noticing that Bennett looked like his panties were in a twist over something…again. I loved my brother-in-law, but sometimes he was wound so tight he drove all of us crazy. How Chloe put up with him was beyond me, and I laughed to myself thinking of her nickname for him.

"Do you want to send your mother into a fit by ruining the dinner she has planned? You be nice tonight, Emmett. No teasing or joking with Chloe. You know she has to be nervous enough about all this. Lord knows she puts up with enough crap from this one," I said, pointing at Bennett.

Bennett looked like he was going to have an aneurysm, and he actually shouted at me in response.

"What are you talking about? I haven't done anything to her."

This was interesting-he was even more wired today than normal, and I decided a little teasing was in order. I leaned back against the counter, crossing my arms and raising an eyebrow as I challenged him.

"Oh really, Mr. Sweetheart? Would you like to know what Chloe calls you? What they *all* call you?"

I paused for a moment, relishing catching Bennett off guard and wondering how he'd respond. I couldn't keep the smile from my face as I dropped the bomb on him.

"Beautiful Bastard."

Emmett almost doubled over with laughter, but Bennett looked as though he was going to explode.

"Why exactly is this so funny to you?," he barked at his brother, turning to glare at me. "And how did you know?"

"Jasper, my friend we ran into at lunch last weekend? He's engaged to Chloe's friend, Alice, the one that works for Gucci. Apparently she started calling you that the day you started. Pretty clever girl, if you ask me."

At that point, Carlisle and Esme joined the conversation, and if I didn't know better, I would have said that Bennett was on the verge of losing it. He was normally so calm and collected, but now he was sighing and running his hand through his hair. Even for him, this was an overreaction to a bit of teasing, and I watched him closely as Carlisle called him over to speak privately. Something strange was going on with Bennett, and I was going to figure it out if it was the last thing I did.

The doorbell rang, and Carlisle and Esme went to answer it while the rest of

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us stayed put. Everyone said hello to Mike when he walked in, and we made small talk while Carlisle took drink orders.

Mike was an old classmate of Bennett's, and Esme had high hopes for him and Chloe. He was good-looking and seemed nice enough, but as I watched him talking with Bennett, it hit me like the proverbial ton of bricks.

Without even seeing him interact with Chloe tonight, I knew what the problem with Bennett was: he must have feelings for her. Of course! It was just like the boys in grade school. He didn't know how to handle it, so he acted like an ass around her. I gave myself a slap in the face mentally. *How could I have missed it?*

This was going to be very interesting, and I wished I could talk to Emmett about it, but I wasn't worried. Unless I missed my mark, we would have plenty to catch up on later.

Bennett excused himself after a few moments, and the rest of us continued to chat until the doorbell rang again. Heading out to greet Chloe, I caught Emmett's eye and smirked. He looked puzzled, but I just winked at him and shook my hips a little as I walked ahead, still thinking about what he'd said back at our house. Between my epiphany about Bennett and my plans for Emmett later, this was turning out to be a great night all-around.

Chloe looked gorgeous in a Gucci sundress from the latest collection and an adorable pair of platform peep-toes that I'd been eyeing myself just last week. Mike's eyes almost came out of his head when he saw her, but if she noticed she didn't let on.

Bennett appeared on the stairs just as Esme suggested that we head out to the patio for cocktails, and Chloe greeted him politely. I didn't really hear more than that of their exchange, but I snuck a look at them as I turned to join everyone else and saw her touch his shoulder as she walked by. She was laughing and he looked even more tense than ever. *Ahhhh.. so it wasn't just one-sided, then. How interesting.*

We moved to the dinner table not long after that, and that's when things became even more obvious between them, at least to me. I sat next to Bennett, across from Chloe, so I was able to observe them both from rather close proximity.

It wasn't that the conversation didn't flow easily, because it did, with Mike interjecting every so often with a polite observation or question for Chloe. At one point, Mike asked about her background, and what happened next told me

exactly how involved Bennett and Chloe were.

Mike made an innocent, polite comment by way of complimenting Chloe on her class standing at Northwestern, and I was amazed that Bennett's response didn't stop the conversation cold. *Was I the only other dirty-minded person at this table?*

"Yes, it's absolutely amazing having Ms. Mills under me. She always gets the job done."

While the rest of the family ooh'd and aah'd over what they perceived as a compliment, I did my best to keep my jaw from hitting the floor. That sneaky bastard. He didn't just like her…they were fucking!

This was insane; Chloe was here to be set up with Mike, and Bennett was doing his best to mark his territory, albeit in a very slick way. What were these two playing at?

Chloe continued to chat and flirt with Mike, but now that I knew for sure that something fishy was going on, I wasn't fooled. I caught a movement out of the corner of my eye, and looked down to see Bennett's hand slipping under the tablecloth. I almost couldn't believe my eyes, because in the brief moment before the cloth settled back, I realized that his hand was resting on a foot. A foot in his crotch. I looked away quickly, but it took everything I had to keep my composure and not blurt out something to the effect of, *'Oh, you have GOT to be kidding me! '*. These two were ridiculous; I knew exactly what had to be done, and Mike gave me the perfect in without even knowing it.

"Oh, speaking of lunch dates, you remember my friend, Megan? You met her last month at the house.

Mid-twenties, my height, blond hair, blue eyes. Anyway, she asked for your number. Are you interested?"

"Sure. You know I prefer blonds, Rose. Might make for a nice change of scenery."

That did it, alright. If looks could kill, Chloe's would have dropped Bennett to the floor. The table descended into silence, and Chloe quickly stood to excuse herself. After a few awkward moments of being scolded by his parents, Bennett reluctantly got up to find her and apologize. We listened to his angry stomping through the house before Esme suggested coffee and dessert and everyone gratefully sprang into action.

The table was cleared, with the guys back out on the patio talking sports in no time. I stayed in the kitchen to help Esme get everything together, wondering if

she might bring up Bennett and Chloe, but she didn't mention them at all. We talked about nothing in particular, brewing the coffee and plating a beautiful cake that she'd made.

It was only as we went to take the trays out to the patio that Esme realized that she hadn't set aside any napkins. She apologized, and asked if I'd run up to the linen closet on the third floor to grab a stack. I wondered later if she knew somehow what I would find instead, but now I just told her I'd meet her on the patio and started up.

I took the steps quickly, not wanting to keep everyone waiting. I absentmindedly thought about heading home later with my husband, hoping that dessert would go quickly.

I had just put my hand on the railing to the second flight of stairs when I realized two things simultaneously: neither Chloe nor Bennett had returned to the patio, and I could hear a strange tinkling sound coming from somewhere above. I had absolutely no idea what it could be, and I listened hard as I slowed my progress, but it didn't repeat.

What I heard next left no room for confusion, though. It was obvious that muffled moans were coming from the bathroom at the top of the stairs. It took me a second to process what that meant; by then I had reached the landing and paused as my thoughts stuttered out. *Unbelievable!.. they were actually.. oh, your ass is SO mine, Bennett.*

I stood there steaming, plotting what I would say as soon as they opened the door. Picturing the looks on their faces when they saw me. Snickering softly when I thought about how they would struggle to come up with something, *anything* to say in their own defense. Smirking as I thought about what they'd do when they realized they had nothing. This was going to be epic, and I wanted to remember every last moment of it.

All was silent again by then, and I climbed the remainder of the stairs to wait outside the bathroom door. I listened to them walk across the room, crossing my arms and tapping my foot impatiently.

The door flew open, and Bennett and Chloe stopped cold when they saw me, both looking like they'd stopped breathing. I gave each of them my frostiest look before letting a dangerous smile creep onto my face.

"I think the three of us need to have a little talk."

———————————-

This POV picks up just after Rose walks away from Bennett, as written in

Chapter 9 of The Office. If you're up to date (of course you are, wtf?) then you should have no problem falling into step with her again.

_____-

I turned away from Bennett, walking quickly towards the patio. I felt Emmett's eyes on me as soon as I crossed the threshold, and glanced over to find him looking concerned. I smiled at him weakly, my lips pursed, barely shaking my head as I looked away. Of course, he knew that something wasn't right; I was still so angry that I couldn't pretend with him. I needed to get a hold of myself or everyone else would know that something was up, too.

I was thrilled to see that Chloe was leaving, since I was sure that none of us wanted to pretend that everything was normal any longer than necessary. She must have begged off by saying she wasn't well, because both Esme and Mike were fussing over her. She murmured goodbyes all around as he escorted her to the front door, sparing me only a quick glance in passing. I gave her extra points for not trying to smile, because there was no way I could have returned it.

Bennett made to walk after them, but I caught his arm and pulled him close to whisper angrily.

"Just because I agreed not to say anything doesn't mean that I don't expect you to take care of this, and sooner rather than later. This is an untenable situation, which you alone need to rectify."

He looked at me for a long moment, nostrils flaring, before nodding once.

"Say that you'll make it right."

His shoulders slumped, and he gripped the bridge of his nose between his index finger and thumb.

"I will, Rose. I'll take care of it," he murmured.

"Don't force my hand on this, Bennett. I don't like keeping things from my husband, and I will not act the gatekeeper to your dirty little secret."

He nodded once more before walking into the house.

I busied myself with helping Esme clean up, avoiding Em's glance as we emptied the table and took care of the dishes. Fortunately no one said anything about our separate disappearances, and the remainder of the evening, though short, passed without incident. Bennett left just before we did, although how he stayed as long as he did was beyond me. His parents seemed blissfully unaware of any issues, but I spent the rest of the time looking anywhere but at him, while Emmett's stare could have bored holes.

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We finally said goodnight to Esme and Carlisle, and walked across the drive to our car, not speaking.

Emmett pulled down the long drive as I did my best to calm myself, my hand shaking as I pulled my cell out of my bag.

I hit a speed-dial and listened to a series of rings before voice mail picked up, gathering my thoughts.

I didn't trust myself to talk to Bennett again for awhile, but I could most definitely leave him a message. I spoke as quietly and calmly as I could, but there was no mistake in the tone of my voice.

"I really cannot believe you, and furthermore, I cannot believe what happened. Remember what I said, and do not underestimate me, Bennett. You'd better clean up this mess *now*."

I snapped my phone shut and threw it back into my bag, leaning back to stare out the window at the passing lights. So much for our nice family dinner.

"What is going on between you and my brother? Does this have anything to do with…" Emmett looked at me with a scowl on his face, waiting for my response.

"Em, don't. I…I can't, ok? It's just…God, I'm so pissed off I could cut somebody!" I shrieked, balling my fists up in frustration.

"Whoa, whoa, babe…it's gonna be all right," he said, reaching over the console to grab my hand.

"Nothing could be all that bad, Ro. We don't have to talk about it, but I fucking hate to see you getting all tore up about whatever it is. I have a feeling I know what this is about, and it'll work out…I promise."

It was late, and the car was dark except for the faint lights from the instrument panel. I looked over at Em, watching him as he concentrated on driving. He looked over, blowing me a kiss before looking back to the road. This man was mine, my very own amazingly smart, sweet, handsome, protective, and fuck-hot sexy man. I felt like the luckiest woman in the world.

"I know, Em…thanks for reminding me. I'm sorry, baby. I love you so much," I said, feeling a pinprick of a tear in my eye. It wasn't my life that was a mess right now, that was someone else's reality. Two particular some ones, actually, and I wasn't going to allow myself to spend one more second on Bennett and Chloe, at least not today.

"I love you, too, Ro. I don't like to see my mama upset, is all."

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He lifted my hand up to his lips, placing a long, soft kiss over my knuckles. He looked at me, his eyes intense even as he showed me his dimples.

“You know I don’t wanna see you make a fist unless you’re grabbing the sheets, babe.”

I tried to look shocked, but he knew me too well for that. I couldn’t keep myself from thinking about the last time that exact thing had happened, and the spark from earlier in the evening came back.

I smirked back at him, giggling a little as I realized what I wanted to happen next. We were fairly close to the house, and I was definitely not ready to go home yet. Thank God it was late, and we hadn’t seen any other headlights for the past few miles.

“Baby, can you start up my car mix, please? I feel like hearing some tunes for the rest of the drive.”

“Awww…you’re not gonna make me listen to Beyonce, are you?” Emmett knew I loved her latest album, and that I’d had it on repeat for a while. Because we usually weren’t in the car together, he hadn’t heard my latest mix. I smiled, thinking about what his reaction would be when it started.

“You know I wouldn’t do that, Em. Just press the little button, big man, and make sure it’s turned up,”

I purred at him, knowing what was coming.

He rolled his eyes, smirking, but did as I asked. I knew he thought that I was fronting, and was waiting for ‘Single Ladies’ to start. I didn’t get to surprise him that often, and I was enjoying this to the hilt.

I wanna li-li-li-lick you from your head to your toes and I wanna move from the bed down to the down to the to the flo’

Then I wanna, ahh ahh – you make it so good I don’t wanna leave But I gotta kn-kn-kn-know what-what’s your fan-ta-tasy Ludacris’ voice came booming out of the speakers on top of a heavy baseline, and Em finger froze over the play button.

”Not what you thought it was going to be?” I ran my tongue along the inside of my upper lip, a guaranteed move on its own, but paired with the track playing it worked almost too well. Emmett was slack-jawed, his eyes frozen on my mouth, and he pulled over to the side of the empty road we were on before the next verse had even started.

“What’s the matter, baby…cat got your tongue?” I slipped one long nail into

my mouth, biting lightly on the tip while I stared at him. “See something you want?”

He grabbed for me, but I was already out the door, making for the big tree we’d stopped near. I thought I might have a chance, but my feet were in the air in what felt like a heartbeat.

”You didn’t really think you were going anywhere, did you? He set me down, turning me in his arms before picking me up again and striding towards to the car. He carried me like it was nothing, heading straight for the back. He set me down on the trunk, pushing my skirt up and spreading my legs in one smooth movement. I loved it when Em was in charge like this, doing exactly what he wanted, and knew that I wanted, too.

He snaked his hands up along my hips and fisted my panties, looking for all the world like he planned on ripping them.

“Emmett Ryan, if you rip these panties I will get my ass back in the car faster than your balls can turn blue.”

“Then get them off NOW, Rosalie, or I won’t be responsible for what happens. You most definitely will not be getting back into the car, either way,” he said, his tone no-nonsense.

Oooh, my big, hard man, making me want to come before we even got down to business. I pushed back hard on his shoulders, leaning in to graze his lips with mine before standing up on the bumper of the car. He was close enough that I felt his hot breath on my waist as I spread my legs a bit, teasing him as I slowly ran my hands up under my skirt to the apex of my thighs. I slipped my index finger along the front of my panties to tap lightly on my pussy.

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“Right here, baby? Is this what you’re trying to get to?”

“Rose…,” he growled, “what did I just say to you?”

“Oh, I heard what you said. I just don’t think that…”

…but before my lips even began to form my next word, my panties were gone, and I was on my back with Em’s face buried in me, moaning out what seemed like the last of the air in my lungs.

I was already wet from our play, and the way he lapped at me made me even slicker. I tried to put my hands on his head, but he pinned them against the car, sucking on my clit hard and fast. I screamed out as I pushed myself against him, his tongue and lips driving me wild.

He must have been undoing his pants while he worked me over, because the

next thing I knew he was climbing up to slam his cock into me while he pushed my leg back against my shoulder. My other leg automatically wrapped around his waist, my stiletto flush against his ass, pulling him into me as hard as I could.

Our sounds filled the night; we were impossibly loud, yet seemingly powerless to stop it. There was no one in the next room, and no neighbors to feel embarrassed talking to the next day, just the two of us and nothing else. We couldn't have stopped for anything at this point.

"Yeah…give it to me just like that, baby. You know the way I like it, don't you?"

I threw my head back, moaning and arching into him as he grabbed at my breasts roughly through my blouse, pounding into me over and over.

"Look at me, babe," he said, reaching around the wrap his hand into my hair and pull me back up.

"This is what I was thinking about the whole time we were at my parents', looking at you all fucking sexy across the table. I couldn't wait to get balls deep into your pussy."

He closed the distance between our mouths, capturing my lips in his and pushing his tongue in roughly to suck on mine. He let go of my hands long enough for me to start unbuttoning my blouse, but I froze when I noticed a light towards the bend in the road. A moment later I heard the distance hum of an engine.

"Em, stop…there's a car coming."

He pulled out of me, stepping down as he straightened his pants and shirt, blocking me from any possible view at the same time. I slipped down after him, shimmying my skirt back down and running my fingers through my hair. The car was probably still half a mile away when he wrapped his arms around me, holding me tight against him. When I peaked over his shoulder, my heart dropped into my stomach. It was a police car, and it was slowing down and pulling onto the shoulder. *Oh, this was just phenomenal.*

"This cannot be happening!" I buried my face in his chest, horrified at this entire night, never mind being caught fucking my husband out in the middle of nowhere.

The cruiser stopped a couple of lengths behind us, and a police officer got out. He called out to us before closing the distance, shining his large flashlight ahead of him as he walked.

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“Good evening. It’s a bit late to be hanging out on the side of the road, isn’t it?”

“We live a few miles from here, and we were just stopping to talk for a few minutes before heading home to relieve the babysitter.”

“Huh. You stopped to talk? May I see your license and registration, sir?”

Emmett nodded, rubbing my arms as he let me go and walked around to the passenger side. I stood there uncomfortably, only glancing at the officer long enough to see him looking at me skeptically as he waited for Emmett to return. If only a crater would open up under us now, I could be spared any further humiliation, but that seemed rather unlikely.

Emmett handed the paperwork over to the officer and stepped back to put his arm around me again.

Maybe he would just make a show of checking out his information and then leave again, and then just maybe we could get back to business. As I stood there waiting, getting more annoyed by the second, he looked up at Emmett.

“Emmett Ryan? The same Ryan that threw the 20-yard pass to win State in ’96?”

“Yeah, man-that’s me. Did we go to school together?”

“No, sir-I was freshman at St. Anselm’s, but I will never forget that game. I’d never seen a Hail Mary before that, and you fucking killed it. Excuse me, ma’m.”

I looked at him, trying my best to keep my jaw from dropping, and nodded. He remembered Em from high school? What are the odds?

“Yeah, that was a great game, and I will never forget…”

Oh, hell no. I was not going to stand on the side of the road reminiscing about football while my panties were in my husband’s pocket and our babysitter was up the road. I appreciated that the connection would probably get us out of a ticket or a scolding, but still. This was too much to ask of me after tonight.

“Officer, I am so sorry to interrupt you, but I’m not feeling very well. I would appreciate it if we could get going so that Emmett could take care of me,” I said to him softly, making my eyes as big as possible. “When we first stopped I felt fine, but I seem to have a really bad ache now. If everything’s ok, would you mind?”

I felt Em quaking beside me, and I slipped my hand down over his belt to pinch his ass, keeping the same expression on my face.

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“Uh, sure…of course, m’am. I’m sorry for any trouble, I just wanted to make sure everything was ok,” he said, handing Em’s license and registration back to him. “You take care of your wife, Mr. Ryan, and I’ll be on my way.”

He reached out to shake hands, nodding quickly to me, before heading back to his cruiser. Emmett guided me around the car with his hand on the small of my back, his laughter threatening to erupt as we got closer to my door.

“Oh, I’m gonna take care of you alright,” he chuckled. I smiled as I slipped into my seat, just as the officer called out to him. He stayed where he was, leaning his arms against the car as he answered, rattling off some football stats, and I realized that his zipper was at just the right level, and reached out to slowly slide it down.

“Not if I take care of you first, baby,” I said lowly, reaching in to slip him out and into my mouth. I had to give him credit, he jumped a bit when he realized what I was doing, but he never missed a beat. I would have laughed if my mouth hadn’t been so full of his cock.

He called out a final goodnight, and I heard the police car reverse, making a u-turn to drive back into town. Em’s hands were in my hair seconds later, and I reached around to grab his ass and pull him further into me.

I moaned around his length as he hit the back of my throat, tasting his salty sweetness as I sucked greedily. We really should have been home by now, but I’d wanted to suck him off since earlier at the house, and I couldn’t let him go until I did.

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“Holy shit, babe…what are you doing to me? Goddamn, you suck my cock so good,” he yelled, and I knew he was close. I took him all the way again, wrapping my hand around the base, and with a long groan he released into my mouth. I continued to suck, swallowing everything he gave me, and I didn’t stop until he was completely still.

I slipped him out of my mouth; tucking him into his pants and pulling the zipper back up as I looked at him. He reached down to pull me into his arms, holding me tightly in the moonlight.

“Jesus, Ro-that was fucking amazing. If I could, I would tell every guy I know about what you do to me. You are so beautiful, you’re an amazing wife and mother, and you make me cum like it’s the first time, every time.”

“Baby!”

“I could never tell you any of those things enough. I can’t believe I get you all to myself; I am the luckiest guy alive, and I would be lost without you, babe.”

He reached out to press his lips to mine softly, holding my face in his hands. I kissed him back, my heart soaring at his words and my mind repeating over and over… *my man.*

I pulled away from him, looking into his eyes and almost losing myself in the love I found there. I was more than ready to get back to the house now.

“Take me home, Em. I still have that ache I need you to help me with, and it seems to have gotten a lot worse in the last few minutes. I want you to get me naked and tell me everything again; do you think you could do that?”

“Babe, you know I can do all that and a whole lot more. Get that sweet ass in the car,” he said, warming me with his hand for good measure, sending a red-hot line straight to my core and making me twitch in all the right places.

We made it home in record time, and as soon as Vicki was gone, Em made good on his promise over and over again, all night long. *God, I love my life.*

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